

'Living wage' should be at least Tk 52k

AFWA says after taking rising expenses into account

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A working person in Bangladesh should earn at least Tk 51,994.51 monthly, as a "living wage", to be able to support a family, said the Asia Floor Wage Alliance (AFWA) in an online discussion yesterday.

The AFWA, founded in 2007, is an Asian labour-led global labour and social alliance across garment-producing countries (such as Bangladesh, Cambodia, India, Indonesia, Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka) and consumer regions (USA and Europe) for addressing poverty-level wages, gender discriminations, and freedom of association in global garment production networks.

It came up with this figure using the theory that a worker needs to be able to support themselves and two other "consumption units", where one unit is one adult or two children.

A living wage is one that is high enough to maintain a normal standard of living.

The Alliance stressed on the fact that a worker needs a wage that not only meets the individual's basic needs but also that of their family, taking into account that one family could have a single earning member.

A family of three adults, or two adults and two children, would need to spend at least Tk 40,442 per month, said the platform.

To understand the pattern of income and consumption expenditure, AFWA spoke to 300 RMG workers from 63 factories.

They found that while a little more than half of their families had two earning members, as much as 40 percent of the respondents had families with 4-6 members.

The researchers found one family's income to be Tk 24,137, which is less than half of what the family would need for food and non-food expenditures.

The family ends up having to spend Tk 24,373 per month.

"The total expenditure of a family is higher than their income, even where there are two earners in the family working in garment industry," said Md Arifur Rahman, country coordinator of AFWA.

Considering this, it is seen that an RMG worker consumes on average only 1,950 kilocalories.

This is significantly below the poverty-line food-consumption standard of 2,122 kCal, calculated by the country's own Household Income and Expenditure Survey.

"These figures show the unsustainability of the current wage structure in Bangladesh's garment industry and the persistent debt cycle it forces workers into," said Rahman.

Taking into consideration the sheer amount of physical activity a worker must do per day, the platform surmised that a family would need 9,000 kCal a day.

With that into account, the platform tallied the amount of cereal (like rice, flour), pulses, animal protein, vegetables, fruits, oils, spices, and cooked/packed meals that a family would consume over a month.

It also tallied the monthly non-food expenditures of a family, like education, clothing, shoes, entertainment and travel, health expenditure and household consumables.

"Insufficient wages mean that a worker has less money [than what is needed] to feed themselves a nutritious diet and have enough meals per day.

"This also means that their children have to drop out of school and join a job to supplement their parents' incomes," AFWA said in a press release.

"A worker needs a wage that not only meets their basic needs but also that of their family, taking into account that one family could have a single earning member."



Railway staffers use water and hyacinths to cool down a section of rail tracks which bent due to "excessive heat" in Brahmanbaria's Dariapur area yesterday. Train service between Dhaka and Sylhet and Chattogram was disrupted as only one of the two lines were serviceable.

PHOTO: MASHUK HRIDOY

Fire, heat disrupt train services

Passengers suffer hours of delay

STAR REPORT

Mohammed Hiran had been waiting at Chattogram Railway Station for the Dhaka-bound Mahanagar Express since 12:00pm yesterday.

"I've been waiting for 3 hours, but the train is yet to arrive," he told this newspaper around 3:00pm.

According to the station master, the Mahanagar Express was supposed to leave the station at 12:30pm, but instead, it left at 4:30pm, four hours later than scheduled, causing hundreds of passengers like Hiran to suffer.

Not only Mahanagar Express but other trains were also delayed due to a fire at a tyre store near the port city's Dewanhat area and buckled rail caused by excessive heat in Brahmanbaria, stranding hundreds of passengers in the sweltering heat at various stations.

Sonar Bangla Express, Meghna Express, Mahanagar Godhuli Express, and Bijoy Express failed their schedule and could not leave for Dhaka on time.

Disruptions in train schedules resulted in passengers overcrowding the railway stations.

Jafor Alam, master of the Chattogram Railway Station, said, 58-60 trains carrying 11,000-12,000 passengers operate on the route daily.

"We could not operate five trains as per schedule due to the fire in the tyre warehouse next to the railway tracks. The train service resumed after one and a half hours when the blaze was brought under control."

Meanwhile, rail lines buckled after the Dhaka-bound Upokul Express from Noakhali crossed Dariapur after a stop at Brahmanbaria around 11:00am, said Rafiqul Islam, master of the Brahmanbaria railway station.

Chattala Express, Subarna Express, Jayantika Express, and Kalni Express could not leave Brahmanbaria for Dhaka on time as a result, he added.

"I was going to Dhaka by train for urgent work, but due to a scheduling mishap, I could not reach on time," Shamsul Islam, who was on Jayantika Express, said around 5:00pm.

His train was supposed to depart at 4:20pm, but it left at 5:45pm.

Station Master Rafiqul Islam said, "Seven coaches of a freight train derailed on Thursday, damaging about 500 metres of rails. After the derailed coaches were removed, train movement resumed around 30 hours later. But 16 hours later, the rail buckled again at the same place due to excessive heat."

The rail link was restored after nine hours, he added.

DSA may be amended before nat'l polls

Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Law Minister Anisul Huq has said if it is necessary the government may amend the Digital Security Act to some extent before the national election.

"But, the act will not be repealed. It will stay," he told The Daily Star after an online portal yesterday afternoon quoted him as saying that the law would be amended ahead of the election.

It was reported that he told this to reporters at his village home in Brahmanbaria.

The DSA is widely criticised at home and abroad as a draconian law for journalists.

Journalist communities, human rights activists, political organisations, and even cultural platforms have on many occasions termed the act a threat to freedom of expression and demonstrated for scrapping of the act.



Historian Ranajit Guha passes away

STAR REPORT

One of the most influential South Asian historians, famous for his epoch-making work on subaltern studies, Ranajit Guha, who would have turned 100 this May, passed away yesterday.

The Indian historian breathed his last at his home in Austria's Vienna Woods, where he lived with his wife Mechthild Guha, after retiring from Australian National University in 1988, fellow historian Dipesh Chakrabarty said.

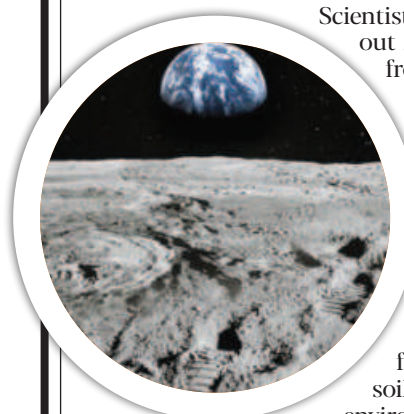
Ranjit was ill for a long time due to various old age complications, he said.

He is one of the most

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Nasa extracts oxygen from lunar soil

INDEPENDENT ONLINE



Scientists at Nasa have figured out how to extract oxygen from lunar soil in a major boost for the US space agency's plans to build human bases on the Moon.

A team from Nasa's Johnson Space Center in Houston successfully removed oxygen from simulated lunar soil within a vacuum environment for the first ever time by using a high-powered laser to create a carbothermal reaction.

The Carbothermal Reduction Demonstration (CaRD) experiment could prove vital for producing oxygen for breathing, as well as for propellant for transportation.

"Our team proved the CaRD reactor would survive the lunar surface and successfully extract oxygen," said Nasa engineer Anastasia Ford.

"This is a big step for developing the architecture to build sustainable human bases on other planets."

The success of the latest experiment means the oxygen harvesting technology is now at a readiness level of six, meaning it is ready to be tested in space.

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SSC, equivalent exams begin today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Secondary School Certificate and equivalent exams will begin today.

According to the education ministry, 20,72,163 candidates are likely to take this year's SSC and equivalent exams.

The exams will be held on all subjects with full marks but on revised syllabuses.

They will be held in 3,810 centres across the country for students from 29,798 schools, madrasas, and technical institutions, and some 374 students abroad.

Education Minister Dipu Moni on Tuesday said only exam centre secretaries will be allowed to use phones, but without internet or camera facilities, in the centres.

Students are directed to arrive at the centres 30 minutes before the exams, while set codes for questions papers will be sent to them via SMS 25 minutes before exams begin.



Steel railing installed along the central reservation of the road in the capital's Baitul Mukarram area cannot stop people from jaywalking. A footbridge is right there but they would not use it. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

5 dead in Texas shooting

Armed suspect on the run

AFP, Washington

US Police were searching for a gunman believed to have shot dead five Hondurans including an eight-year-old child at a house in Texas, the local sheriff said yesterday, in the latest mass shooting to hit the United States.

Investigators believe the gunman had been firing his AR-15 style gun in a neighboring yard when the victims asked him to stop, as they were trying to get a baby to sleep, US media reported.

San Jacinto County Sheriff Greg Capers described a horrifying scene when authorities went to the residence after receiving a call about "harassment" around 11:30 pm Friday.

The victims, aged from eight to 40 years old, were strewn from the front door through the house to an inside bedroom, where two of them -- both women -- were found lying on top of two children who survived the massacre.

"In my opinion, they were actually trying to take care of the babies and keep them babies alive," Capers told ABC's Houston station KTRK.

All the victims had been shot "from the neck up almost execution style, basically in the head," he added. "He had been drinking and he says, 'I'll do what I want to in my front yard,'" Capers told KTRK.

"All the victims were from Honduras," Capers told reporters, adding that 10 people had been in the house at the time.

He said that authorities believe they know who the gunman is, describing him as being from Mexico.

The sheriff's office said later on its Facebook page that the shooter was believed to have left the county.