



**B4** Gender wage gap still persists in agriculture



**P5** Plastic pollution choking Ctg canals



**P7** Israelis try to stop aid trucks of the edge of Gaza



**P11** Bangladesh, India face off in final today

## Distressed in Malaysia

### Thousands of Bangladeshi migrants jobless, unpaid or underpaid

PORIMOL PALMA

For aspiring migrant workers in Bangladesh, Malaysia's reopening of the labour market in 2022 for 15 source countries including Bangladesh to jumpstart its economy from the ravages of the pandemic -- was a godsend.

The Southeast Asian nation had frozen recruitment from Bangladesh in September 2018 following allegations of labour exploitation and high migration costs.

Hoping to change the lives of their families for the better, tens of thousands of men borrowed lakhs to fund the migration process. However, a rude awakening awaited the Bangladeshi migrants in Malaysia: there was no work for them.

More than 400,000 Bangladeshis went to Malaysia since the reopening of the labour market, according to the Bureau of Manpower Employment and Training. In fact, Malaysia recruited the highest number of workers from Bangladesh -- more than 351,000 workers only in 2023.

Many of them are now jobless, unpaid or underpaid.

One such optimistic migrant was Jahirul Islam from Netrokona, who spent Tk 5 lakh to go to Malaysia seven months ago, taking advantage of the relaxed recruitment policy for foreign workers introduced by the Southeast Asian nation in January last year.

Under the special scheme, employers were allowed to hire workers based on their current needs and abilities without having to go through "hiring prerequisites and qualification quotas".

The only requirement was that the foreign workers would be paid a minimum wage of 1,500 Malaysian ringgit (about Tk 35,000 or \$320).

The 30-year-old Jahirul got a construction job at Beaks SDN BHD in Kuala Lumpur, where he would be paid the minimum monthly wage of RM 1500 that could double with overtime and other allowances.

"But there was no work and no pay. We are provided food twice a day -- it's just rice and lentils," he told The Daily Star on March 2 over the phone from a Kuala Lumpur hotel where he and some 50 other Bangladeshis are staying.

The company hired about 600 Bangladeshis but they were not provided with any job. For a few weeks, some of them were assigned to work for other companies with lumpsum or no pay.

What is more cold-hearted is that the company is taking away the passports of foreign workers. Upon furnishing Tk 1.7-1.8 lakh, they could have their most precious identification document back.

If anyone leaves the hotel, he is not allowed to return and thus becomes illegal. In other words, the foreign workers are held hostage in the hotel.

Shakil Khan from Jahirul's cohort was intrepid enough

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



Siltation has almost blocked the Chaktai canal at the place where it merges with the Karnaphuli in Chattogram city. If water does not flow through the canal, waterlogging worsens in parts of the port city in monsoon. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## M'SINGH, CUMILLA CITIES Titu, Suchona win big



STAR REPORT

Amid polling marked by sporadic incidents of violence, Awami League leader Tahsin Bahar Suchona was voted Cumilla city mayor while in Mymensingh, Ekramul Haque Titu, also a ruling party leader, is set to be the mayor for the second time in a row.

Suchona, organising secretary of Cumilla city AL and daughter of lawmaker AKM Baha Uddin Bahar, beat expelled BNP leader and two-time mayor Monirul Hoque Sakku by 21,993 votes.

Suchona got 48,890 votes, according to Returning Officer Farhad Hossain who announced the unofficial results at Cumilla Zilla School in the evening.

The other candidates, expelled BNP leader Nizam Uddin Kaiser got 13,155 votes and Noor-ur Rahman Mahmud Tanim, got 5,173. Voter turnout was 38.82 percent.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 5

## No good news for consumers in Ramadan

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MUNTAKIM SAAD

With Ramadan just two days away, consumers will have to deal with the hiked prices of essential for the month of fasting this year.

The prices of onions; chickpeas; soybean; oil; sugar; some fruits, including dates; lentil, pulled rice; potatoes; aubergines; Isabgol (psyllium husk); green chili; coriander; lemons; mint leaves; sauces and juices, among more items, are all on the rise.

Most of these products are used to prepare iftar.

The Daily Star visited five kitchen markets in the capital over the past two days, including those in Mirpur, Purba Shewrapara, Kachukhet, Ibrahimpur, and Karwan Bazar, to gauge how the price shocks are affecting the people.

Five shopkeepers in Karwan Bazar told this correspondent that the sales of Ramadan essentials increased over the past two days.

While there is no shortage of the items, the prices for most of them have risen compared to the previous year, they said.

The common varieties of dates -- a must-have iftar item for many -- are being sold at Tk 500-1,100 a kg in Karwan Bazar and Kachukhet, up from last Ramadan's Tk 250-450.

Compared to last year, the prices of onions

have risen by 157 percent, potatoes by 54 percent, garlic (imported) by 60 percent, ginger (local) by 82 percent, according to data published by the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh (TCB).

Onions are being sold at Tk 100-110 per kg, which was Tk 30-35 last year.

Md Gofran, proprietor of Cumilla General Store in Karwan Bazar, said that except for soybean oil, the prices of nearly all items have increased this year.

He is currently selling a litre of bottled soybean oil at Tk 160, which was Tk

170 last year.

Gofran said sugar was being sold at Tk 145 per kg, which was 115 last year; lentils at Tk 110-140, up from last year's Tk 95-130. Chickpeas are being sold at Tk 110 while last year the price was Tk 90.

Kheshari dal, used for making "piyajur" (onion tempuras), currently costs Tk 120 per kg, which was Tk 80 last year. Besides, chickpea gram flour, known as besan, is now Tk 140 a kg, an increase from last year's Tk 110 last year.

Munni Begum, a resident of Begunbari in Tejgaon, visited Karwan Bazar yesterday and expressed concern over the substantial increase in prices of Ramadan essentials.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## BGMEA POLLS Sannilito Parishad wins landslide

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) will have SM Mannan Kochi as its new president after his panel won the trade association's biennial election in a landslide victory.

Kochi-led Sannilito Parishad won all 35 posts of directors in the election. Of the 35 posts of directors, 26 are in Dhaka and nine are in Chattogram.

Currently, Kochi is the senior vice president of the BGMEA. He is also the general secretary of Awami League's Dhaka North City unit.

The BGMEA election took place yesterday to elect the new executive committee for the 2024-26 tenure at BGMEA's Dhaka and Chattogram offices.

In Dhaka, 1,839 out of 2,032 votes were cast, while in Chattogram, 387 out of 464 votes were cast.

SEE PAGE 5 COL 7

## SCBA POLLS Pro-BNP secretary candidate among six arrested

### BNP's Mahbub Uddin Khokon elected president, pro-AL Shah Monjurul Hoque secy



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Police arrested six lawyers and a court placed five of them on a three-day remand in a case filed over Friday's violence centring the Supreme Court Bar Association election.

Pro-BNP lawyer and secretary candidate Ruhul Quddus Kazal was arrested yesterday evening near his Purana Paltan chamber.

Kayser Kamal, legal affairs secretary of the BNP, said Kazal was arrested because he was a secretary candidate from the pro-BNP lawyers' panel.

"The charges against him are false. We demand his immediate release," he said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

## BGB-BSF MEET Zero border killing pledged yet again

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) and the Indian Border Security Force (BSF) have agreed to bring down the killings along the 4,100-kilometre-long border to zero through various measures.

The measures include enhanced joint patrolling and vigilance, public awareness programmes, preventing criminals or inhabitants from crossing the border and real-time information sharing, as per a joint statement.

The statement was read out at a joint press conference yesterday at BGB Palkhona headquarters following the director general level conference between the two forces.

In the last three years, killings along the Bangladesh-India border marked a gradual rise despite repeated state-level commitments to bring such killings down to zero.

The trend continued

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



Shoppers browse through an assortment of local and imported dates at a streetside bazaar adjacent to the Baitul Mukarram Masjid in the capital yesterday. This iftar staple, a must-have for many during Ramadan, is now more expensive than it was last year. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## A 'very unequal society' looms This may happen in 10yrs despite economic strides, says Prof Rehman Sobhan

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Eminent economist Prof Rehman Sobhan thinks Bangladesh in the next 10 years will be a very unequal society even though the economy could be diversified and better off in terms of aggregate.

He said this at a conversation marking the launch of two volumes of his autobiography: Untranquil Recollections.

The University Press Limited, which published the books, held the event at its office in the city yesterday.

Prof Sobhan spoke about the books that contained his life stories of upbringing, education, transformation and engagement in public policy of Bangladesh and pre-independence era.

A member of Bangladesh's first Planning Commission and a close aide to Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, he candidly discussed how he developed socialist democratic values during his education in London and then decided to settle in the then East Pakistan and work for the people.

Responding to a question as to how he sees the economy in the next 10 years, Prof Sobhan said, "So, it is the economic power that equals political power. Political power is being used to perpetuate economic power -- that

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5