

P3 Preserving a painful past



P7 Julian Assange granted reprieve from extradition to US



P11 Palestine loss hard to digest for Cabrera



B1 Fruit imports surge for Ramadan

Reverse migration rises twentyfold in five years

Soaring cost of living, scarce jobs to blame

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA and WASIM BIN HABIB

A few months after his honours examinations at a college in Satkhira in 2018, Quazi Monjurul travelled to Dhaka looking for a job.

After around four months, he was hired by a company.

As his initial salary was not much, he struggled to bear the living expenses in the city and send some money to his parents in Kaliganj, Satkhira.

After he received a few raises, he got married at the end of 2019 and rented a two-room flat in Pallabi.

Then came the Covid-19 pandemic. His company closed for good and it was not until three months later that he got another job. But the salary was smaller than the previous one.

Monjurul is one of the millions of people whose lives were upended by the pandemic.

"It became very difficult to make rent and support my family even after I got the job. I used up all my savings. Sometimes I contemplated going back home," said Monjurul.

But he kept trying to find other jobs and struggled to make ends meet in the city. In 2022, his wife gave birth to a daughter. In the months that followed, the prices of food and the cost of living rose. But his earnings did not. Finally, in July last year he travelled back to his village.

"I tried my best, but running my family in Dhaka and supporting my elderly parents with an income of Tk 25,000 was impossible. I had no choice but to return," said Monjurul who now has

a small poultry farm in his village.

"At least I don't have to pay the rent now."

Like him, many people return to their villages amid rising costs of living, a sense of insecurity and scarcity of jobs.

More and more people have been migrating from the city to the villages for several years, according to Bangladesh Sample Vital Statistics published by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

The study surveyed more than 3.08 lakh households across the country and found that 13.8 out of every 1,000 people returned to the village in 2023. Such migration rose by almost 20 times since 2019.

The number of people who moved to urban areas from villages fell to 19.6 per thousand in 2023 from 26.4 in 2022, says the report.

Alamgir Hossen, director of the Sample Vital Registration System project, said the pandemic was one of the key causes of reverse migration. A section of people could not recover from the loss of earning and left the cities.

People choosing not to migrate to the cities means they are trying to make it in the villages.

"Many people, however, are still coming to the cities in search of jobs and some are succeeding in finding one," Hossen said.

Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of the Power and Participation Research Centre, said besides high food inflation, there were rising rents and transportation costs.

On the other hand, job opportunities and people's earnings in the major cities had declined.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Like every year, the students of Gazipur's Iqbal Siddiquee College visited the Jatiyo Smriti Shoudho, otherwise known as the National Martyrs' Memorial, in Savar to commemorate Independence Day yesterday.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Independence Day observed

UNB, Dhaka

Bangladesh yesterday observed the Independence Day and the National Day with due solemnity and enthusiasm.

On March 26, 1971, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman declared Bangladesh's independence following the crackdown on unarmed Bangladeshis by the Pakistani occupation forces on the midnight of March 25.

After the nine-month Liberation War, Bangladesh achieved its independence on December 16, 1971.

The day was a public holiday.

In the morning, President Mohammed Shahabuddin, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, and visiting Bhutanese King Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck paid tributes to the martyrs of Liberation War by placing wreaths at the National Memorial at Savar.

On her return from Savar, Hasina paid homage to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman by placing

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

Bangladesh's birth was a long and bloody affair. Although an independent Bangladesh was born through the declaration of independence by Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in the early hours of March 26, 1971, the first seeds of independence were sown decades earlier. Today we run the last installment of a three-part special series that looks back at some of the events in late 1960s leading up to the declaration of independence.

CHRONICLING BANGLADESH'S BIRTH The final push

AHMAD ISTIAK

After president Ayub Khan was forced to resign in the face of the 1969 mass uprising, General Yahya Khan assumed office on March 25. He immediately moved to consolidate his power by dissolving both national and provincial assemblies, effectively scrapping the constitution, and declaring martial law across Pakistan.

Within days, Yahya declared his intention to hand over power to elected representatives. At the same time, he announced the governing principles and a legal framework that essentially retained power in his own hands.

Awami League vowed to press on with six-point movement, and demanded abolition of certain provisions of the framework that were in conflict with democratic principles.

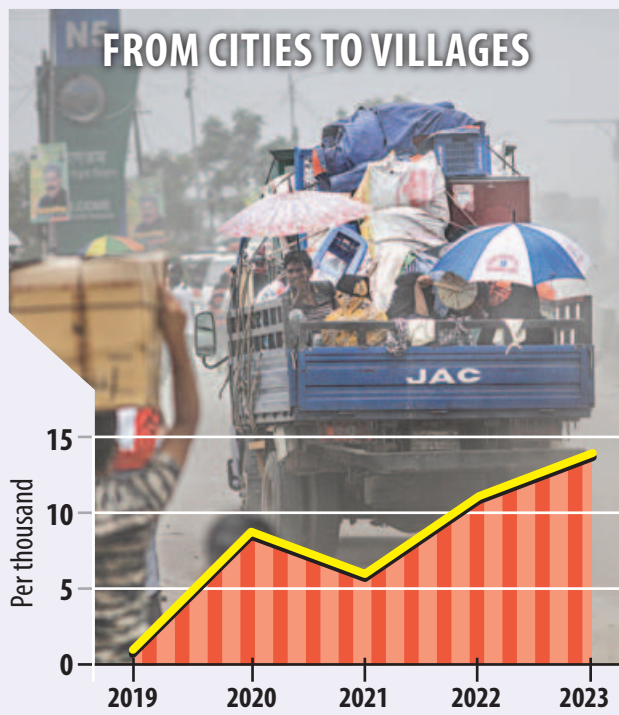
Yahya paid no heed, and after forming a new cabinet in early August 1969, he declared that Pakistan would go to polls by the end of 1970.

The following month, Sarbadaliya Chhatra Sangram Parishad held a three-day programme at Dhaka University to commemorate the 1962

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



ASM Abdur Rab hoisting Bangladesh flag for the first time on March 2, 1971.



FROM VILLAGES TO CITIES

Per thousand

2019	15
2020	12.7
2021	18.4
2022	26.4
2023	19.6

"The pressure from both inadequate job opportunities and high cost of living forces people to migrate."

HOSSAIN ZILLUR RAHMAN
Noted economist

FROM VILLAGES TO OTHER DISTRICTS

per thousand

2019	18.3
2020	17.7
2021	17.8
2022	28.4
2023	19.4

SOURCE: BBS

'BOYCOTT INDIA CAMPAIGN' Top BNP leaders in two minds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP standing committee members think the party should not yet get involved in the ongoing campaign for boycotting Indian products.

They said although there is pressure from within for supporting the campaign, the party is yet to finalise its stance regarding the matter.

The top leaders believe that some people, including online activists, called for the campaign in late January out of their grievances against India over the January 7 national polls.

"BNP has nothing to do with the campaign. But if the party joins the campaign, it will be given a political colour, which may in the end backfire," said a BNP standing committee member who attended a virtual meeting of the committee on Monday night.

He said there is no doubt that the anti-Indian sentiment is running high among the party's rank and file, especially after the national election. The issue was discussed in detail at the meeting.

Another standing committee member suggested assessing the overall situation regarding the campaign and drawing up a strategy on dealing with the issue.

"The issue will be discussed at upcoming meetings, and then the party will make its position clear," he said.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Nasima Begum is getting her card verified at a TCB shop in Ward-31 of Mohammadpur's Razia Sultana road to purchase essentials at a subsidised price yesterday. While TCB trucks are available every day and consumers can obtain cards on the spot, these shops operate once a month in different wards for those who already have TCB cards.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

70pc households change food habits for high inflation

Finds a 2023 survey of SANEM

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As many as 70 percent of the households in Bangladesh changed their food habits involuntarily to cope with the high prices, according to a survey by the South Asian Network on Economic Modelling (SANEM).

"Such a large cut down on food consumption habits puts households at risk of food insecurity," said the think-tank in a press release yesterday.

The survey, which interviewed 9,065 households across Bangladesh between April and November last year, measured food insecurity following the Food and Agriculture Organisation guidelines on the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES).

Between April and November last year, the FIES worsened for poor and non-poor households across all regions.

Among the poor households, moderate food insecurity increased from 25 percent in April to 30 percent in November, while severe food insecurity has increased from 4 percent to 7 percent of the poor population.

Poor from urban areas are more food insecure than rural: 29 percent of the rural poor households and 32 percent of the urban poor households were categorised as moderately food insecure in November last year.

In both rural and urban areas, severe food insecurity was found to be 7 percent among poor households.

As many as 78 percent of the rural households and 76 percent of the urban households cited the unusually high

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4