

China launches Shenzhou-22 early for stranded space station crew

AFP, Beijing

China conducted an urgent unmanned spacecraft launch yesterday, after damage to a previous mission's return capsule left the crew on its space station without a means of getting back to Earth.

The Long March 2F rocket carrying Shenzhou-22 lifted off shortly after midday from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China, footage from state broadcaster CCTV showed.

Recent Shenzhou missions have been used to crew China's Tiangong space station, exchanging teams of three astronauts every six months.

Shenzhou-22 was originally slated for a crewed launch in 2026.

But it was launched early after a suspected space debris strike to the Shenzhou-20 return capsule made it unsafe for re-entry to Earth, leaving its crew briefly stranded.

The Shenzhou-20 team returned aboard Shenzhou-21 on November 14 -- nine days later than planned -- leaving their relief crew without a reliable return vehicle.



Police officers and rescuers inspect a crater left by a Russian missile strike at a supermarket warehouse compound in Kyiv, Ukraine, yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

Tulip's trial 'unfair and contrived'

Top UK lawyers write to Bangladesh high commission

STAR DESK

Leading British lawyers, including a former Conservative justice secretary, have described the trial in Bangladesh of former UK city minister Tulip Siddiq as "contrived and unfair."



They made the statement in a letter to Bangladesh's ambassador to the UK ahead of the verdict, according to The Guardian.

Siddiq, who resigned from the UK government in January, is due to receive her verdict and sentence in absentia, with the prosecution seeking a maximum life sentence term, on December 1.

The Labour MP for Hampstead and Highgate is the niece of deposed Bangladeshi prime minister Sheikh Hasina, who was handed a death sentence last week over charges of crimes against humanity during last year's crackdown on student-led protests.

Published yesterday, the Guardian report said that a group of high-profile lawyers, including Robert Buckland KC, who served as justice secretary under Boris Johnson, and former Tory attorney general Dominic Grieve, wrote to Abida Islam, Bangladesh high commissioner in the UK. They said Siddiq has been denied basic rights

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Pay hike for civil servants

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Contacted, Finance Adviser Salehuddin Ahmed said he would try to introduce the Pay Commission 2025 partially during his term.

"Full implementation will take a long time. But we will take a call on this once we get the final report from the pay commission. We can't say anything on this matter before January."

The commission is calculating the pay hike keeping in mind the cost and standard of living.

Once the full report is received, the recommendations will be assessed with the hikes extended to judicial and defence services.

"But it is true that a large portion of the increase in next fiscal year's budget would go towards implementing the new pay scale," Ahmed added.

On November 10, the Coordination Council on Budget and Macroeconomic Review planned a Tk 883,000 crore budget for next fiscal year, an increase of Tk 93,000 crore year-on-year.

Ahmed, however, clarified that the pay scale is not the only reason for the upward revision of the non-development budget in fiscal 2025-26.

The 10 percent and 5 percent special allowances extended after the budget announcement in June will have to be accommodated, he said.

However, the revised budget for this fiscal year and next year's budget will be finalised in April next year by the elected government, according to finance ministry officials.

The interim government formed the Pay Commission in July to be led by former Finance Secretary Zakir Ahmed Khan.

The commission may submit its

report to the government in the first week of December, The Daily Star has learnt from people with direct knowledge of the matter.

The new pay scale will try to ensure that the civil servants' real salaries do not fall below the 2015 level.

Besides, the government's revenue collection situation and capacity will be taken into consideration such that the new pay scale do not put cause extreme fiscal strain.

The government has taken a host of initiatives to boost revenue collection, Ahmed said.

"This will be done by increasing compliance and not by raising the tax

rose to Tk 50,775 crore the following year.

This fiscal year, the allocation for the overhead is Tk 84,114 crore. In addition, Tk 35,657 crore has been allocated for pensions and gratuities for retirees.

Meanwhile, at the Coordination Council meeting, this fiscal year's budget was trimmed by Tk 2,000 crore to Tk 788,000 crore.

However, the size of the annual development programme (ADP) was reduced by Tk 30,000 crore to Tk 200,000 crore, while the revenue budget was increased by Tk 28,000 crore to Tk 588,000 crore.

| BUDGET IN NUMBERS in crore taka | SOURCE: FINANCE DIVISION | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------|-----------|
| | 2025-26 | 2026-27 | |
| | ORIGINAL | REVISED | ESTIMATED |
| Total expenditure | 790,000 | 788,000 | 883,000 |
| Revenue budget | 560,000 | 588,000 | 630,000 |
| ADP | 230,000 | 200,000 | 253,000 |

rates."

Besides, economic activities have picked up after the announcement of the election in February.

"Investor confidence has picked up, so investment will increase and with it, revenue collection," he said.

The last pay scale was implemented in 2015 in two phases: basic salary from July 1, 2015 and allowances from July 1 the following year.

In fiscal 2014-15, the allocation for salaries and allowances was Tk 28,709 crore. And after implementing the new pay and allowances, the allocation

Regarding the reduction in ADP allocation, Ahmed said that the progress of implementing the development budget has been slow.

"In addition, we are following very strict policies in expenditure. Purchases for projects are being carefully scrutinised. For these reasons, implementation is low," he said.

In the upcoming fiscal year's budget, ADP allocation has been set at Tk 253,000 crore and non-development budget at Tk 630,000 crore.

17 highly harmful pesticides

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four herbicides (used to kill unwanted plants); and two rodenticides, according to the study funded by the Global Environment Facility, which provides grants and policy support to developing countries to protect the environment.

The study examined 343 active pesticide ingredients as per the eight global criteria set by the Joint Meeting on Pesticide Management of FAO and WHO.

"Any pesticide that can cause serious or permanent harm to people or the environment is considered highly hazardous," said entomologist Gopal Das, who led the study with technical support from FAO Bangladesh.

Ten of the 17 HHPs are used widely across Bangladesh. They are Paraquat, Glyphosate, Chlorpyrifos, Abamectin, Acetochlor, Glufosinate Ammonium, Zinc Phosphide, Bromadiolone, Carbenazim, and Propiconazole.

The remaining seven HHPs are used either moderately or infrequently. They are Cadusafos, Thiacloprid, Spirodiclofen, Dimethomorph, Beta-cyfluthrin, Cyproconazole, and Edifenphos.

Experts said several of these pesticides are linked to cancer and long-term health effects, while some are highly toxic to aquatic species, birds, and pollinators such as honeybees.

The seven-member team from Bangladesh Agricultural University (BAU) in Mymensingh and Sylhet Agricultural University, which conducted the study, identified eight more HHPs that are registered with the Plant Protection Wing of DAE.

However, it found no trace of the pesticides at dealers' shops or in crop fields during the survey between December 2023 and August 2025.

The eight HHPs are Ethoprophos, Cyfluthrin, Triazophos, Methyl Bromide, Trichlorfon, Diuron, Epoxiconazole, and Flusilazole.

Currently, more than 8,000 pesticide products are registered with the Wing.

One of the HHPs, Paraquat, is commonly used by farmers in Bangladesh though it is banned in more than 40 countries, including 27 member states of the European Union.

"This pesticide ingredient poses serious health risks. If farmers are exposed to the chemical, it could affect their lungs and kidneys," said Gopal Das, a professor of entomology at BAU.

Another herbicide, Glyphosate, causes serious damage to soil.

Once the chemical is applied to plants, it seeps into the soil, mixes with soil nutrients and makes its way into the crop.

"In Bangladesh, Glyphosate is permitted for use in rubber and tea gardens. But farmers all over the country use it on other crops as well," he said.

On January 2, 2020, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association

(BELA) filed a writ petition with the High Court, seeking a ban on Glyphosate.

Three days later, the HC ordered the government to formulate an action plan within 90 days to phase out harmful pesticides, including Glyphosate, and introduce safe alternatives.

However, the government has yet to make any move.

When contacted, Muhammad Shah Alam, deputy director (pesticide) of the Plant Protection Wing, said that in December last year, they decided not to register any products containing Paraquat and Glyphosate. Currently, 187 products composed mainly of these two ingredients are available on the market.

He further said 19 active pesticide ingredients have been banned since 1960 due to their harmful effects.

Asked whether Paraquat, Glyphosate and other HHPs would be banned, he said their fate would be decided in the next meeting of the Pesticide Technical Advisory Committee under the Wing. He, however, could not provide any date.

Data from Bangladesh Crop Protection Association (BCPA) show a steady rise in both pesticide use and the number of manufacturers.

For crop pest control, farmers across the country used at least 40,832 tonnes of pesticides last year compared to 38,648 tonnes in 2023.

The number of pesticide companies in Bangladesh has risen to 900 from 124 in 2010, according to the data.

"The more the number of companies grows, the harder it will be for the authorities to regulate them. This must be addressed immediately," said Gopal Das.

PESTICIDE USE IN VEGETABLE

According to a 2023 review report, 77 percent of farmers in the country used pesticides on vegetables. Of them, 87 percent sprayed pesticides with little or no care, and 92 percent didn't take precautionary measures during use, storage, or transportation.

Of those who used pesticides, 37 percent sprayed vegetables with the chemicals once, 31 percent did so twice, and the rest multiple times. Some even used pesticides 17 to 150 times on a single crop throughout a growing cycle.

Tests on 1,577 winter vegetables revealed that 30 percent of the samples were contaminated and 73 percent exceeded the maximum residue limit of 0.05mg per kg, said the report prepared by four faculties from BAU and a physician from Mymensingh Medical College.

Pesticide contamination was detected in all the gourds tested; 92 percent of beans; 78 percent of tomatoes; 73 percent of eggplants; 62 percent of cucumbers; and 50 percent of cabbages and cauliflowers.

TOLL ON HEALTH, ENVIRONMENT

Improper use and exposure to pesticides may lead to cancer and health

complications, according to experts.

Nearly 35 percent of farmers in Bangladesh experience acute symptoms such as nausea, headaches, and respiratory distress due to pesticide exposure, said a review published by the International Journal of Research and Scientific Innovation (IJRSI) in March this year, 2025.

Abul Hasnat, associate professor at the National Institute of Cardiovascular Diseases, said that if farmers inhale pesticides while spraying or come into contact with them, they may immediately suffer from nausea, headaches, respiratory problems or eye irritation.

"If anyone consumes food contaminated with pesticides over a long period, the person may develop cancer, neurological disorders and liver diseases depending on the types and amounts of pesticides," he said.

A study published recently by a group of hematologists found that at least 150 of 430 patients, admitted to seven cancer hospitals in Dhaka between July 2017 and June 2018, used pesticides in crop fields.

"Many of our patients are farmers with a history of pesticide use... But not everyone who uses pesticides will inevitably develop cancer. It largely depends on the physical condition of the individual who uses them," said Amin Lutful Kabir, a cancer specialist, who led the study.

This correspondent talked to a farmer, Md Mukter Uddin from Kishoreganj, who has been diagnosed with cancer.

"I have been spraying pesticides on my crop fields for many years," said the 65-year-old, who began farming in his childhood.

Asked whether he wore a mask while spraying pesticides, Mukter said he always wrapped a piece of cloth around his face for protection.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Experts and activists call for urgent action to restrict or ban these hazardous pesticides to safeguard public health and protect biodiversity.

Gopal Das said the government has to adopt both short and long-term approaches to phase out the HHPs from the market.

"They [the government] cannot simply ban all these ingredients overnight. They must find alternatives to those pesticides and then proceed with the ban. Otherwise, it will affect food security," he added.

Noting the absence of regulation or control mechanisms for pesticides purchase and use, he said, "A farmer can purchase and use any quantity of pesticide he wants."

DAE should strengthen field-level monitoring and arrange training programmes to teach farmers how to use pesticides safely, he added.

Poverty swells as economic downturn bites

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inflation and job losses from 2022 to 2025. The report notes that 62 million people remain just above the poverty line with "unstable consumption, limited savings, and inadequate social protection." These households, it says, were disproportionately exposed to the combined pressures of inflation, shrinking real incomes, and a weakening labour market.

Labour incomes also softened as job creation slowed and real earnings for less-skilled workers stagnated. Employment fell by nearly two million between 2023 and 2024, with a further loss of 800,000 jobs expected in 2025. Women and young people were the hardest hit.

"A business-as-usual approach will not accelerate poverty reduction. The fastest path to reducing poverty and ensuring dignity is through job creation, particularly for youth, women, and vulnerable populations," said Jean Pesme, World Bank Division director for Bangladesh and Bhutan.

The downturn compounds a structural shift already underway since 2016. While rural areas drove poverty reduction between 2016 and 2022, aided by expanding agricultural employment, urban poverty declined more slowly, and job quality deteriorated. Rural poverty fell by 8.5 percentage points during the period, compared with 4.6 points in urban areas, narrowing the rural-urban gap significantly.

But the transformation was not wholly positive: job creation increasingly moved into lower-productivity sectors, and the contribution of labour income to poverty reduction plunged from 89 percent in 2010–2016 to 51 percent in

2016–2022.

LABOUR MARKET

Despite withdrawing from the labour market, more young women are pursuing education. Between 2016 and 2022, the share of females aged 15 to 29 engaged in education rose from 27.3 percent to 31.6 percent. Yet enrolment among young poor females grew more slowly than the national average, widening the education gender gap from 10.6 percent in 2016 to 14.4 percent in 2022 for females aged 15 to 24.

Investing in education has not necessarily translated into urban job opportunities. Low national urban unemployment rates mask the deep struggles young, educated cohorts face in securing work, according to the report.

"We have a paradox that education is not being translated into human capital," said Hossain Zillur Rahman, executive chairman of the Power and Participation Research Centre, speaking as chief guest at the launch. "Unless we solve this core paradox, any '10,000 jobs programme' will merely reinforce inefficiency. We must assess why education is not being converted into productivity."

Even as the national unemployment rate declined between 2016 and 2022, nearly one-fifth of young women remained unemployed, while unemployment among young men rose by 2.5 percentage points.

"This is partly explained by the mismatch between the skills provided by the education system and the needs of the job market," the World Bank said.

"If we truly want to raise productivity and create jobs, our

domestic market will not suffice. Bangladesh must pursue deeper regional cooperation — in trade, investment, and connectivity," said Prof Mustafizur Rahman, distinguished fellow at the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

Weakening job prospects have also pushed many discouraged workers — especially women — out of the labour force altogether. Labour force participation fell from 60.9 percent to 58.9 percent between 2023 and 2024, adding three million working-age people to the ranks of the inactive — 2.4 million of them women.

This decline follows patterns highlighted earlier in the report: while rural labour force participation rose from 59.1 percent to 65.4 percent between 2010 and 2022, urban participation fell from 56.4 percent to 51.1 percent, despite stronger employer demand and higher wages in cities.

"In rural areas, a significant proportion of women often work as unpaid family labourers or in very specific kinds of informal jobs," said Prof Sayema Haque Bidisha, pro-vice chancellor of Dhaka University. "The quality of jobs is more important than employment elasticity."

AK Enamul Haque, director general of the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, stressed the need for an investment-friendly environment, noting that job creation is closely tied to the health of the banking sector. "The state of the banking sector is crucial for promoting economic growth. Public investment is also essential to reduce poverty, particularly by linking rural areas with urban centres," he said.