

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.

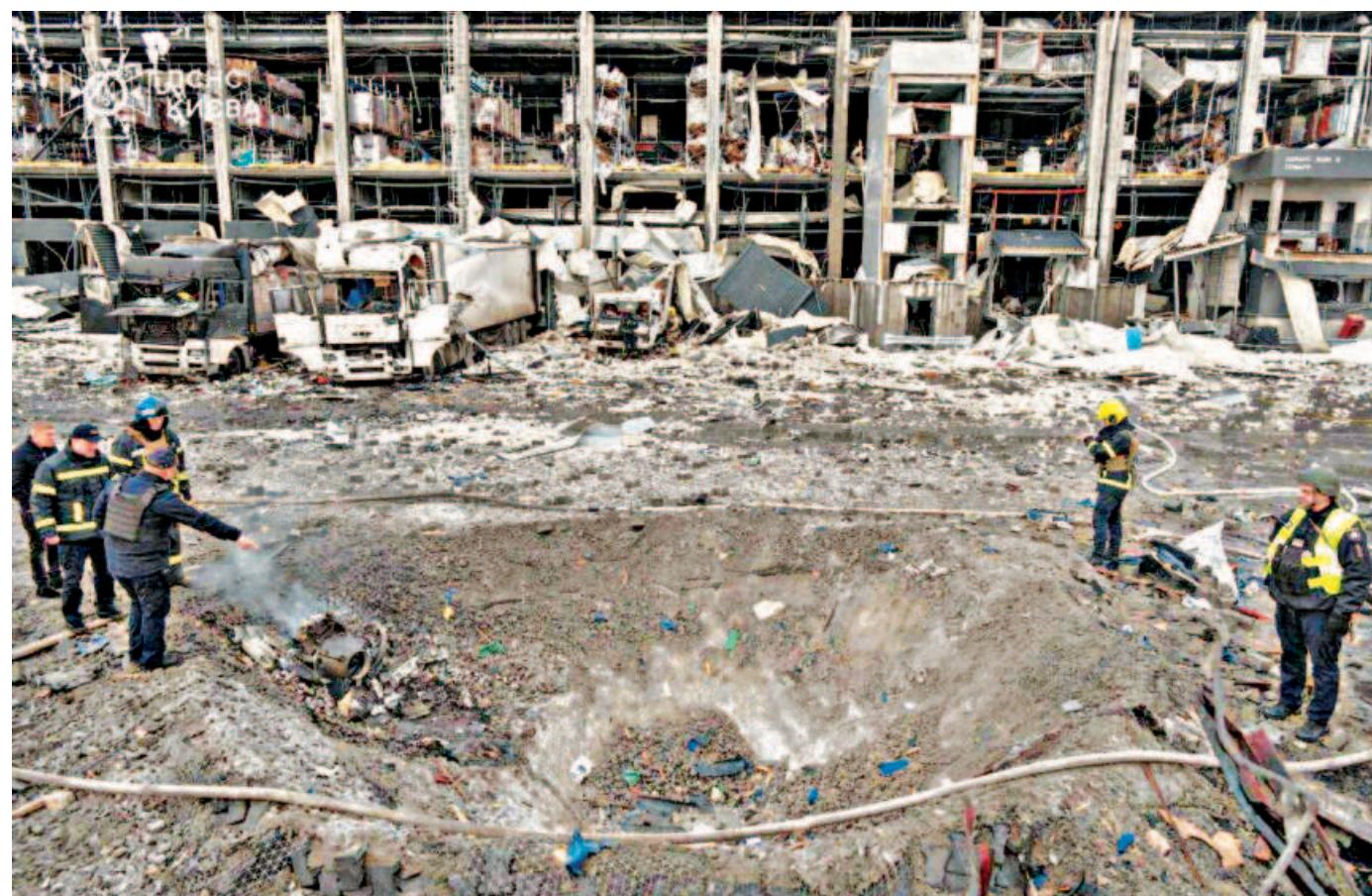
The Long March 2F rocket carrying Shenzhou 22 lifted off shortly after midday from the Jiuquan Satellite Launch Centre in northwest China, footage from state broadcaster CCTV showed.

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

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.

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.

One of the HHPs are Paraquat, Glyphosate, Chloryrifos, Abamectin, Acetochlor, Glutosinate Ammonium, Zinc Phosphide, Bromadiolone, Carbendazim, and Propiconazole.

The remaining seven HHPs are used either moderately or infrequently. They are Cadusafos, Thiacloripid, 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, Epoconiconazole, 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

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.

"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

due to a power outage. As many as 200-250 houses had already been gutted, with flames raging through the Cumilla Potti, Barishal Potti and "K" Block sections of Bou Bazar.

Firefighters, along with locals, were working to contain the blaze.

Crowds were seen running in panic, some trying to save their belongings, others using the tubewell water to douse the blaze.

"Where are you? Everything I own is burning. Please help me," Md Masud, 25, was heard saying over the phone.

A cleaner by profession, he was at work in Banani when the fire started. His wife, Mahiron, a househelp, was also away. When he rushed back to his home, he found it in flames and later called relatives for help.

Masud and his wife, from Sherpur, have lived in Korail with their seven-year-old daughter for years.

"By working at others' homes, they had managed to furnish their

17 highly harmful pesticides

FROM PAGE 1

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, Chloryrifos, Abamectin, Acetochlor, Glutosinate Ammonium, Zinc Phosphide, Bromadiolone, Carbendazim, and Propiconazole.

The remaining seven HHPs are used either moderately or infrequently. They are Cadusafos, Thiacloripid, 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.

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

Fire ravages Korail slum

FROM PAGE 1

the spot. After five hours, firefighters brought the blaze under control around 10:30pm. No casualties were reported as of the filing of this report.

Speaking to reporters around midnight, Fire Service Director (Operation and Maintenance) Lt Col Tajul Islam Chowdhury said about 1,500 homes were damaged. "Fully extinguishing the flames would take more time."

He said heavy traffic delayed the arrival of the first fire engines by 30-35 minutes, causing the fire to spread.

"Once there, fire engines could not enter the slum through the narrow alleys, forcing the crew to lay long hose lines."

The cause of the fire could not be determined immediately.

During a visit to the slum around 7:30pm, the reporter found the 90-acre slum plunged into darkness

(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.

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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.

house with a bed, a fridge and some jewellery -- but everything was gone in the blink of an eye," said Masud's sister Maleka Begum.

Another resident Aklima Khatun said, "I could not take anything. I bought everything with so much struggle, and now it is all gone?"

Lovely Begum, a resident of the slum for seven years, said, "Everything I own is gone. I bought a TV, fridge and furniture on instalments. The fire burnt."

Many stood in tears as their possessions turned to ashes.

Firefighters said as supply exhausted, water pumps were set up at the adjacent canal. Three generators were placed at the canal's edge to power the pumps.

Meanwhile, Chief Adviser Professor Muhammad Yunus conveyed his heartfelt condolences to the affected families and wished a speedy recovery for those injured.

Tulip's trial 'unfair and contrived'

Top UK lawyers write to Bangladesh high commission

STAR DESK