China, N Korea open border bridge to boost trade

AFP, *Dandong*

A new four-lane road bridge linking China and North Korea finally opened yesterday, 12 years late, enabling the Asian giant and its isolated nuclear-armed neighbour to step up cross-border trade substantially.

China is its neighbour's largest trading partner and a vital diplomatic and political backer, although relations have not always been smooth with the ruling Kim dynasty.

Hundreds of people gathered yesterday in the northern Chinese border town of Dandong, taking selfies in front of the 3,026-metre (9,927-feet) New Yalu River vehicle bridge before it opened.

Trucks bearing the nations' flags began moving in both directions late morning, AFP reporters at the scene said, some of the North Korean vehicles decorated with flowers.

"It's great," one woman who came to watch told AFP in the town dotted with Chinese as well as Korean shops and restaurants, where residents were relieved the bridge had finally open.



Palestinian school children are ushered away from the site of an Israeli drone strike that killed one Palestinian in Jabalia in the northern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

Durga Puja festivities begin with Maha Shasthi today

UNB, *Dhaka*

Durga Puja, the biggest religious festival of the Hindu community, will begin in Bangladesh today with Maha Shasthi.

On the first day, devotees will perform Bodhan, the ceremonial awakening and invocation of Goddess Durga, marking the formal beginning of the festivities.

This year, Durga Puja will be celebrated at 33,165 mandaps across the country.

Devotees of all ages are expected to visit the mandaps and offer prayers to Goddess Durga, seeking her blessings for peace, prosperity and the welfare of the country and its people.

Mahalaya, which marks the beginning of preparations for Durga Puja, was observed across the country on October 9. Associated with the ceremonial invocation of Goddess Durga, it is observed seven days before the festival begins.

The main rituals will continue through Bijoya Dashami on October 21, when devotees bid farewell to the goddess. The festival will conclude with the immersion of idols.

This year, Maha Saptami Puja will be observed over two days, October 17 and 18, followed by Maha Ashtami on October 19 and Maha Nabami on October 20.

Security has been tightened to ensure peaceful celebrations, with members of various law enforcement agencies deployed at puja mandaps across the country.

A total of 212,118 members of the Bangladesh Ansar and Village Defence Party have been deployed during the festival, with eight personnel assigned to each high-risk mandap and

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Triumph of early rice varieties

FROM PAGE 1

two crops annually are now producing three," said DAE Deputy Director (Rangpur Region) Sayada Sifat Zahan.

She said more and more farmers are growing Rabi or winter crops after harvesting early-maturing Aman.

Aman, which makes up 40 percent of annual rice production, was cultivated on 621,690 hectares across five districts of Rangpur Division this year. Short-duration rice varieties accounted for 155,422 hectares or about 25 percent, up from 20 percent five years ago, according to data from the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Agriculture officials said the government began field trials of early-maturing Aman in 2005 to eliminate monga. Gradually, cultivation of such rice varieties expanded across the northern region and other parts.

Farmers harvested a record 1.73 crore tonnes of rice across the country last Aman season as they expanded cultivation of high-yielding and hybrid varieties, according to a recent report by Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

WHAT FARMERS SAY

For Ahad Ali from Kurigram's Dasiar Chhara village, early harvest means he doesn't need to wait longer to grow his next crop.

This year, he planted early-maturing varieties on three bighas of his nine-bigha plot and long-duration varieties on the rest. After harvesting paddy on those three bighas early this month, he immediately prepared the three bighas for winter vegetables: cauliflower, tomatoes and also chilli.

"Now I can harvest Aman about a month earlier and grow winter vegetables afterwards. This allows me to cultivate an additional crop from the same land and increase my income," said 50-year-old Ali, who has been growing short-duration varieties for seven years.

In Lalmonirhat's Karnapur village, 65-year-old Ranjit Debnath recently harvested an early-maturing variety of rice on two bighas of his eight-bigha plot.

"I have been cultivating early-maturing Aman for eight years. I consider it an additional crop because I can earn more from winter vegetables after harvesting the paddy," said Ranjit, who already prepared two bighas for growing cauliflower this year.

Last year, he grew cauliflower on two bighas and made a net profit of Tk 90,000. "If the weather remains favourable, I hope to make a profit of over Tk 100,000 from cauliflower sales this year," he added.

EARLY AMAN TRIALS

With the aim of eliminating monga, BRRI and Rangpur-Dinajpur Rural Service, a non-governmental organisation, launched field trials of a short-duration Aman variety in 2005.

Md Mazid, former chief scientific officer and head of Agronomy Division at BRRI, led the initiative and started testing BRRI Dhan-33 in farmers' fields.

The following year, the DAE, BRRI and several NGOs worked together to expand its cultivation in the north. By 2010, was being cultivated widely across the region.

In northern Bangladesh, particularly in the Rangpur region, a lack of agricultural work during the Bengali months of Ashwin and Kartik (mid-September to mid-November) once triggered seasonal monga.



AI-assisted illustration

Recalling his experience during that period, Md Mazid said, "During my stay in Rangpur in 2002, farmers grew long-duration varieties such as BR-11, which were harvested in Agrahayan (late November to mid-December). Earlier in Kartik, labourers had no work.

"They sold their labour in advance, borrowed rice from moneylenders and had to repay one and a half maunds for every maund borrowed. They even had to sell their cattle to survive."

All that changed through the cultivation of BRRI Dhan-33, which matured a month earlier, creating agricultural work such as harvesting and threshing. It freed land early for growing potatoes, which sold for Tk 80 to Tk 100 a kg instead of about Tk 10 at the peak season, he said.

Khandakar Md Iftekharuddaula, chief scientific officer and head of the Plant Breeding Division at BRRI, said early-maturing varieties ripen 30 to 40 days earlier than the conventional ones.

Farmers can now grow three crops a year on the same land, and in some cases even four, by following cropping patterns that combine Aman, potato, mustard, winter vegetables and Boro, he said.

Abu Fattah Md Rawshan Kabir, deputy director of the DAE in Kurigram, said farmers previously left their land fallow for around three months before planting early winter vegetables.

They are now using that period to cultivate early-maturing Aman, he said, adding that yields from early-maturing Aman varieties have increased from 13-14 maunds per bigha to 16-18 maunds in many cases.

These rice varieties are now cultivated across vast areas of Rangpur, Gaibandha, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat and Nilphamari, and also in parts ofother districts, including Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Rajshahi, Satkhira and Gopalganj.

Md Obaidur Rahman Mondol, director of the DAE's field service wing, said these varieties are not suitable for all regions, as land conditions and cropping patterns vary, he said. These could be difficult to grow in areas where water levels remain high during the planting season, he said.

WHAT EXPERTS SAY

Wais Kabir, former executive chairman of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, said short-duration rice varieties could help farmers reduce losses from flash floods and rising soil salinity.

He stressed the need for adjusting planting dates and choosing the right varieties based on types of soil and weather conditions.

Sharif Ahmed, a cropping systems agronomist at Bangladesh office of the International Rice Research Institute, said the introduction of a third crop during the fallow period between two rice crops could help diversify production and reduce dependence on imports.

He said farmers in several areas have already included mustard and legumes, such as mungbean and lentil, in their cropping systems. Legumes help improve soil fertility, while mustard adds organic carbon through decomposed leaves and crop residues.

These crops add organic matter to the soil, help maintain soil health and can reduce farmers' dependence on chemical fertilisers, he added.

Our Rangpur correspondent S Dilip Roy contributed to this report.

Dhaka to press Delhi for Hasina's extradition

FROM PAGE 1

A foreign ministry official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the two countries had begun a series of bilateral engagements ahead of a possible high-level meeting, including a trade meeting held a week ago.

"At the consular dialogue, Dhaka will seek the extradition of political figures currently taking refuge in India, including Sheikh Hasina, Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal and the alleged killers of Sharif Osman Bin Hadi," the official said.

Hasina has remained in India since fleeing Bangladesh during the mass uprising in August 2024. She and Asaduzzaman were sentenced to death in absentia by Bangladesh's International Crimes Tribunal in November 2025 for crimes against humanity.

According to Indian media reports, India's courts, rather than its government, will ultimately decide whether to extradite Hasina. The courts would have to determine whether the alleged offences are also recognised under Indian law.

India's extradition law provides for a judicial inquiry. If a magistrate finds a prima facie case, extradition may be recommended; otherwise, the fugitive may be discharged.

Bangladesh's request includes the required legal documents under the 2013 India-Bangladesh Extradition Treaty. The treaty provides for surrender of people charged with or convicted of offences, while excluding certain political offences. However, serious crimes including murder, manslaughter, assault, incitement to murder and crimes against humanity cannot automatically be treated as political offences.

Established in 2017, the consular dialogue is a regular mechanism for discussing consular matters, visa procedures and mutual legal assistance. The two countries have held four rounds, the latest in New Delhi in May 2024, before the July uprising.

The upcoming meeting will also cover border and cross-border movement, push-ins from India, visa services, repatriation of detained nationals, release of fishermen, the Mutual Legal Assistance Treaty, extradition cases and renewal of the Revised Travel Arrangement (RTA), officials said. The RTA has been extended every six months since its expiry in 2023.

Esha Srivastava, joint secretary of the consular, passport, and visa division of India's Ministry of External Affairs, and Shah Asif Rahman, director general of the South Asia wing of Bangladesh's foreign ministry, will lead the delegations, officials said.

PUSH-IN, REPATRIATION

Dhaka will raise incidents in which people have been pushed into Bangladesh from India since the July uprising, a foreign ministry official said.

India, meanwhile, has complained that Bangladesh has yet to repatriate people whose names appeared on lists of detained Bangladeshi nationals shared by New Delhi.

The official said some lists contained repeated names or insufficient details, making identification difficult. Bangladesh has repatriated those whose identities it could verify, he said.

"At present, 1,448 Bangladeshis are serving prison sentences in various Indian jails," the official said, adding that the government's policy was to repatriate Bangladeshi nationals found to be residing illegally abroad.

India will seek the repatriation of 25 of its nationals who have completed their sentences in Bangladeshi prisons, and their identities have been verified, according to the consular wing of the Indian High Commission in Bangladesh. These verified Indian nationals are currently lodged as "release prisoners" awaiting repatriation.

Bangladesh has also shared a list of 121 prisoners reportedly identified as Indian nationals whose sentences have been completed.

However, the high commission said insufficient personal details in many cases had made verification difficult.

It has sought consular access to verify their nationality and is awaiting a response from Dhaka. In some cases, sufficient information had been provided, but the process of verifying nationality was still ongoing.

The repatriation of fishermen is another Indian priority. An Indian High Commission official said New Delhi had shared a draft protocol with Dhaka to speed up the process.

"On humanitarian grounds, we want these fishermen to be repatriated at the earliest possible time, as there is no visible border in the sea and they often cross it by mistake," the official said, adding that even short periods of detention affected their livelihoods.

Cruise missile intercepted in Madina region

Says Saudi-led coalition; Houthis deny attack

AFP, *Riyadh*

The Saudi-led military coalition fighting Yemen's Houthis yesterday said it had intercepted a cruise missile in the Madina region, but the Houthis denied carrying out any such attack.

"Interception and destruction of a cruise missile in the Madina region," coalition spokesman Turki Al-Malki wrote on X, with the statement also published by state media.

The Houthis quickly responded by saying they did not target the region yesterday, and had previously vowed to spare the holy cities of Medina and Makkah.

Saudi Arabia has in recent days come under sustained attack from the Houthis, including a strike on Riyadh's international airport that was the kingdom's deadliest in years, as the war with the group escalates.

Riyadh has hit back with strikes against the Iran-backed group's stronghold in the Yemeni capital Sanaa.

"The Yemeni armed forces confirm that they have not carried out any operation today targeting Saudi territory, and that the Saudi enemy's claims of an attack on Madina are a shameless and brazen lie," Houthi military spokesman Yahya Saree wrote on X yesterday.

The Saudi-led coalition also said 20 attacks by the Houthi group on Riyadh airport in October had resulted in 17 fatalities.

Meanwhile, a Saudi foreign ministry official has accused Iran of encouraging the Houthis in their ongoing fight with the kingdom, adding that Tehran continues to arm and train the group.

On Wednesday the Houthis said they had targeted facilities belonging to Saudi oil giant Aramco, with Saudi officials reporting a strike on a building in an area housing the energy giant's operations centre.

As the conflict escalates, a summit between the European Union and Gulf countries in Riyadh has been postponed, Brussels said yesterday.

"The second Summit between the European Union and the Gulf Cooperation Council, originally planned for 24 October 2026 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, has been postponed," said the European Council representing the 27-nation bloc's member states. "A new date will be announced in due course."

Medical libraries ordered to keep books on Zia, Khaleda

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The health ministry has directed all government and private medical colleges and hospitals to keep three books in their libraries -- two on late president Ziaur Rahman and former prime minister Khaleda Zia, and one by Prime Minister Tarique Rahman.

The Health Services Division (HSD) issued the directive on September 27, asking the heads of all agencies under its jurisdiction to take necessary steps, according to the document.

At least one agency, the Directorate General of Nursing and Midwifery, has since directed its subordinate organisations to comply, this newspaper has learnt.

The move followed an application submitted by Jatiyatabadi Prokashona Sangstha, publisher of the books, to State Minister for Health MA Muhit on August 23.

Muhit "strongly recommended" the proposal by writing the words on the application, which bears his seal, signature and date.

Contacted yesterday, Muhit declined to comment on the matter.

The books are "President Zia: Rajnoitik Jiboni" and "Begum Khaleda Zia: Jibon O Songram", both by Mahfuz Ullah, and "Sobar Agey Bangladesh", listed as a book by Tarique Rahman.

Their combined cover price is Tk 4,700.

The directive comes three months after a similar order for primary schools was cancelled.

On June 3, the primary and mass education ministry had asked the Directorate of Primary Education to ensure that the three books were kept in government primary-school libraries. On July 6, however, the ministry cancelled the decision.

In the August 23 letter to Muhit, Zahir Deepti of Jatiyatabadi Prokashona Sangstha requested that copies of the three books be purchased and preserved in the libraries of all government and private medical colleges and hospitals, describing them as historical documents on Bangladesh's political history.

"We believe the books are important as timely documents for doctors, nurses, medical students, healthcare seekers and conscious citizens," the letter said.

Citing the application, the HSD instructed the heads of its agencies to take steps to purchase and preserve the books in the libraries of government and private medical colleges and hospitals.

Similar government initiatives involving books on political leaders took place during the Awami League government.

In August 2019, the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education directed officials and teachers to buy 27 books on Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman for students of government and non-government high schools and colleges. The books were published by Bangladesh Shishu Academy.

In 2014, the DSHE had also asked educational institutions to collect three books on Sheikh Mujib, written by a bureaucrat.

Bangladesh's progress stalls in reducing hunger

FROM PAGE 1

Child stunting -- low height for age caused by chronic malnutrition and repeated infections during early development -- declined from 29.8 percent in 2018 to 24 percent in the latest assessment. The proportion of the population experiencing undernourishment fell from 12.1 percent to 8.2 percent, while under-five mortality declined from 3.3 percent to 3 percent.

The report describes Bangladesh's long-term progress as "a generational achievement".

Child stunting has fallen from 54.9 percent in 2000 to 24 percent in the latest assessment, a reduction of 30.9 percentage points.

Studies cited in the GHI attribute the long-term decline in stunting largely to improvements in parental education, particularly maternal education, and household living conditions. Improvements in health, sanitation and demographic conditions have also contributed.

Among Bangladesh's neighbours, India scored 24.1, Pakistan 25.5 and Afghanistan 28.6, placing all three in the serious hunger category. Nepal scored 14.5 and Sri Lanka 10.2, both in the moderate category.

South Asia recorded an overall score of 23.5, remaining in the serious hunger category, while the global score stood at 18.1, classified as moderate.

The GHI measures hunger through four indicators: undernourishment, child wasting, child stunting and under-five mortality. Lower scores indicate less severe hunger.

Historical comparisons use recalculated data from different reference periods rather than scores published in earlier annual editions. The latest assessment draws on data from different years, including child-wasting estimates for 2021-2025, a 2025 child-stunting survey value and 2024 under-five mortality figures.

Journalist shot dead in Netrokona

FROM PAGE 1

charge of Durgapur Police Station, said Alif had at least three bullet wounds to his head, neck and chest.

"We are investigating the killing and making every effort to arrest those involved," the OC told The Daily Star.

He said police could not immediately identify the attackers or find a motive behind the killing.

On November 10 last year, Alif had survived an attack near Teribazar Ghat on the Someshwari river in Durgapur. Unidentified assailants hacked him with a knife, while one of his colleagues was allegedly threatened with a weapon when he tried to intervene.