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"The level of radiation from mobile network towers is below both international and BTRC limits."
SAYS MD SHAHIDUL ALAM, DIRECTOR GENERAL OF SPECTRUM MANAGEMENT AT BTRC (PAGE B4)



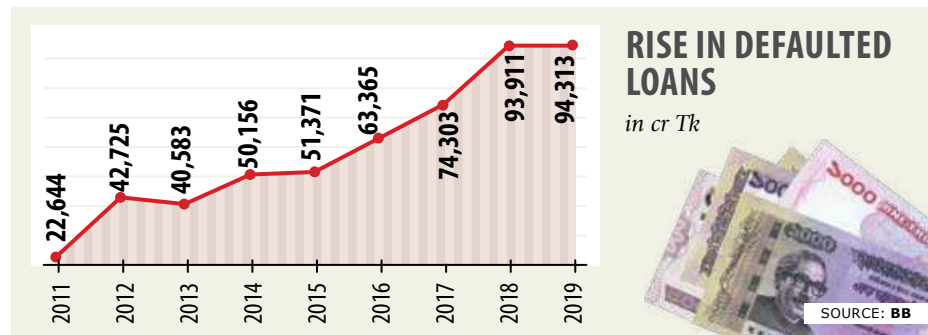
"We need to look at that Test we won against Bangladesh [in Sylhet]...about how we played and achieved that victory. We need to repeat that type of performance."
ZIMBABWEAN REGIS CHAKABVA ON THEIR UPCOMING TOUR IN BANGLADESH

"I can tell you that there are no [militant] safe havens here."
PAKISTANI PM IMRAN KHAN REFUTES ACCUSATION THAT HIS COUNTRY HARBOURS TERRORISTS (PAGE 8)



Defaulted loans still going up

Despite record rescheduling, non-performing loans rose to Tk 94,313cr in Dec 2019 from Tk 93,911cr a year ago



AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

Defaulted loans crept up last year despite the government's attempts to subdue them -- by hook or by crook.

A record Tk 50,186 crore was rescheduled last year, often by breaching banking norms, and yet defaulted loans hit Tk 94,313 crore at the end of 2019, up 0.42 percent year-on-year, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

Defaulted loans, however, decreased last year in proportion to total outstanding loans: it stood at 9.32 percent, down from 10.30 percent at the close of 2018.

"This is a great success for the

government as defaulted loans went down to single digit after a long time," said Md Serajul Islam, spokesperson of the central bank.

Serajul, also an executive director of the central bank, though admitted that the relaxed rescheduling facility had helped show a lower defaulted loan tally.

Of the sum regularised in 2019, Tk 18,584 crore was done under the central bank's relaxed loan rescheduling policy that was announced on May 16 last year.

The policy allowed defaulters to reschedule their classified loans with a down payment of just 2 percent of the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

A man walking on a plank of wood, placed over an under-construction drain, to enter a building on Paschim Biren Ghosh Street in Old Dhaka's Chawkbazar area yesterday. The Dhaka South City Corporation authorities started the construction nearly three months ago, but locals said the work was progressing slowly. In this situation, people in the area are suffering. The sharp iron rods left there also pose danger to them.



ANNOUNCEMENT

Digitisation has revolutionised life, in all corners of the world, in every way imaginable. As the potential for technology to dramatically increase or decrease inequality looms large, how can individuals, policymakers and society at large, best ensure that our future, is an inclusive one? Find out in the fourth instalment of The Daily Star's five-part special supplement series, titled "DIGITISATION AND INCLUSIVITY: TAKING EVERYONE ALONG" which is out today.

The final part of the special series, titled "THE YOUTH IN THE ERA OF DIGITALISATION" is scheduled to come out on February 20.

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Dhaka Wasa for 80pc tariff hike

Sends proposal to LGRD ministry; cites rising operational costs, implementation of dev projects as key reasons

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority has proposed hiking water prices by 80 percent for residential and commercial uses.

Amid allegations of poor quality of tap water in the mega city, Wasa wrote to the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives for increasing the prices on September last year.

The Daily Star has obtained a copy of the letter. Wasa has proposed Tk 20 for each unit (1,000 litre) of water for residential use. The existing price is Tk 11.57. For commercial purpose, it has recommended Tk 65 against the existing rate of Tk 37.04.

Wasa said it has become necessary to hike water prices so that it can repay loans taken for implementation and maintenance of different development projects. Besides, its operational costs have gone up.

"We have sent a proposal and the government is scrutinising it. Possibly, it is at the Prime Minister's Office for approval right now," Taqsem A Khan, managing director of Dhaka Wasa, told this correspondent yesterday.

Huge investment was required for modernising Wasa in recent years, and operational costs have also risen. In this situation, there is no alternative to hiking the price, he added.

"To run an organisation smoothly, subsidy is not an option. We have reduced system loss and modernised the service. So, hike in water prices is a must," he said.

Water prices were increased by 22 percent and 18 percent for residential and commercial uses respectively in 2017. The price of each unit of Wasa water was only Tk 6 in 2009, when the Awami League

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

CORONAVIRUS OUTBREAK Death toll nears 1,800

Hundreds of Americans flown home from cruise ship, 14 with coronavirus

AFP, California

More than 300 Americans rescued from a cruise ship quarantined off Japan because of the new coronavirus arrived back in the US yesterday to begin a further two-week period of medical seclusion, as the epidemic claimed more lives in China to push the death toll above 1,700.

The COVID-19 virus has infected more than 70,500 people in China, and hundreds more elsewhere, sparking panic buying, economic jitters and the cancellation of high-profile sporting and cultural events.

With fresh cases emerging daily in Japan, the government has advised citizens to avoid mass gatherings, and cancelled public events -- including annual celebrations in central Tokyo for the Emperor's birthday and the amateur portion of the city marathon, affecting around 38,000 runners.

Beijing's municipal authorities have ordered everyone arriving in the capital to self-quarantine for 14 days, the presumed incubation period of the virus.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

RELATED STORY ON PAGE 16

Picked up, forced to sign cheques of Tk 1.25 crore

Police official faces probe over businessman's complaint

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Around midnight on January 22, the doorbell rang at Mehedy Sheikh's flat at the capital's Kalachandpur in Gulshan.

Opening the door, the businessman saw two police officers waiting for him. They told him to go with them to Dhanmondi Police Station to pay Tk 50 lakh he owed to someone.

When Mehedy asked whether there was a warrant for him, the officers handcuffed him and forced him into a police vehicle.

He was then taken to Dhanmondi Police Station where he was beaten up and locked inside a room until the morning, Mehedy told The Daily Star.

Around 12:00pm the next day, he was asked to tell his family members to bring his cheque book and trade licence to the police station.

After his family members brought the book and the licence, Mehedy was forced to sign a cheque of Tk 65 lakh and another of Tk 60 lakh.

Around 5:00pm, Mehedy was taken to the office of Deputy Commissioner Sajjadur Rahman of Ramna division, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP). Mehedy said he had a money-related dispute with the Ramna DC.

SEE PAGE 11 COL 5

HC can't give inexecutable directives

Says SC about HC verdicts on river grabbing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Supreme Court yesterday said the High Court cannot deliver any verdict with inexecutable directives.

A four-member SC bench, led by Chief Justice Syed Mahmud Hossain, said this referring to an HC verdict regarding river grabbing and pollution.

Following a writ petition filed by Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh, the HC on February 3 last year declared the Turag a "legal person" and a "living entity" and also directed the authorities concerned to free the river from all kinds of encroachments.

The court issued a 17-point directive to save the country's rivers and waterbodies from grabbers and

SEE PAGE 2 COL COL 3

MASTERPLAN TO SAVE DHAKA, CTG RIVERS

Demarcation to be completed by 2022

Relocation of factories discharging liquid waste to start in 2026

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As per a masterplan for saving rivers in and around Dhaka and Chattogram cities, the government from January 2026 would start relocating factories that discharge liquid waste to a special zone.

The zone would have facilities to treat their discharge and ensure the factories use environment-friendly technologies from 2030, according to the plan documents this paper obtained.

The plan also fixed December 2021 for the authorities concerned to complete demarcation of the rivers and identify legal issues, if any, for stopping river grabbing and maintaining navigability.

In Dhaka, the rivers are: The Buriganga, Dhaleshwari, Turag, Balu, Shitalakkhya, Pungli and Tongi canal.

The Karnaphuli and the Halda in Chattogram will get the masterplan's protection.

In the 10-year-long plan of action to save the rivers, the government identified three major tasks -- stopping pollution, maintaining navigability, and preventing river grabbing.

For achieving the goals, it drew up a roadmap with deadlines for different government agencies and ministries. The masterplan sets short-, mid- and long-term work and goals.

Several agencies and ministries would work under the

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

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আমি তো নিজেই তৈরি করে খাই!

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