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NABABARSHA CELEBRATIONS

Businesses get a big boost

SOHEL PARVEZ and JEBUN NESA ALO

Over the last one week or more, mobile phone users have been flooded with SMSs from fashion houses, retail chains and restaurants offering special incentives and discounts to increase sales before Pahela Baishakh celebration.

Bangla New Year is knocking at the door. So, elaborate preparation is underway to welcome 1424 of the Bangla calendar.

Shops at large malls in Dhaka have been adorned with colourful, decorative festoons to draw customers' attention.

"This is a big festival after Eid and people buy clothes and accessories to celebrate it. We are no exception," said Zeenat Rehenuma, a housewife from the capital's New Eskaton area, after she had bought clothes for her son, husband and relatives.

Her family spends a good amount of money on gifts ahead of Pahela Baishakh, she said.

"I also get gifts from my relatives. It has become a tradition."

Zeenat is one of many who have been buying clothes and other lifestyle products for several years ahead of the biggest carnival of the nation, thanks to marketing campaigns by local fashion boutiques, rising income and growing public interests in sharing joy and festivity.

Once known for Halkhata or opening new books of accounts by businesses on the very first day of Bangla calendar year, the festival has gradually become a celebration for all since it stands out as an identity for Bangalees to be proud of.

It got Unesco's recognition as intangible cultural heritage in 2016.

Today, Pahela Baishakh, also known as Nababarsha, has emerged as one of the major shopping seasons after Eid-ul-Fitr and Eid-ul-Azha, two biggest religious festivals of majority Muslims in the country.

Increased spending targeting Pahela Baishakh has not only given a boost to local boutiques, handlooms and artisans but also helped spur activities in the growing economy where wholesale and retail trade accounts for 14.02 percent of the country's \$195 billion GDP.

Sales are growing every year bringing cheers to businesses ranging from

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Shoppers check out colourful dresses at a shop in Bashundhara City shopping arcade yesterday. Shopping picks up ahead of Pahela Baishakh as many people of the capital want to wear new clothes on the first day of the Bangla year.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON



Raise your voice

Courage icon Sharmin calls on girls to fight child marriage

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladeshi teenage Sharmin Akter, who has turned into an icon of courage, has urged girls to raise their voice against child marriage at their homes and neighbourhoods.

"Girls should not think they are helpless; they rather must seek help from local police and their classmates to stop child marriage," said Sharmin, the winner of the International Women of Courage Award, yesterday.

She returned home from the US on April 5.

Sharmin's dream of pursuing higher education was about to end as her mother

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Caught red handed!

3 teachers, 1 student jailed for preparing answers to leaked HSC question papers

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There is apparently no respite from the attempts to leak out questions by a section of unscrupulous teachers during the public examinations as three were caught red-handed yesterday.

The three teachers along with a student were jailed for different terms after they were arrested while preparing answers to the questions leaked out minutes before the beginning of yesterday's Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) examinations in Dhaka and Patuakhali.

In Dhaka, the arrestees are Sifat Jasmine Noor, assistant professor of biology at College of Development Alternative (CODA), and Mehedhi Hassan, an HSC candidate, said police and officials of Dhaka Education Board.

They were held in front of a restaurant outside the examination centre of Lalmatia Women's College around 10:00am as they were providing answers to questions obtained through mobile phone, Jamal Uddin Mir, officer-in-charge of Mohammadpur police, told The Daily Star.

A mobile court led by executive magistrate Md Tofazzal Hossain sentenced Sifat to two years' imprisonment and Mehedhi to one month and sent them to jail. Mehedhi is a student of Tejgaon College who was sitting for biology exam at the centre yesterday.

Adaitya Kumar Saha, deputy controller of Dhaka Education Board, told The Daily Star, "The drive was conducted on the basis of information we received on Monday."

He said they had come to know that a group of college teachers were assembling at the restaurant during the ongoing HSC examinations and

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Baishakh part of our cultural tradition

No link with religion, says PM

UNB, Dhaka

Describing the Pahela Baishakh celebrations as part of the country's tradition, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon people to stay alert to misinformation regarding the festival.

"There's no link between the celebrations of Bangla

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Party on Everest!



AFP, Kathmandu

Top British DJ Paul Oakenfold braved thinning air and freezing temperatures to host the "highest party on earth" at Everest base camp on Tuesday, playing to around 100 climbers -- all in full mountain gear.

The 53-year-old artist, who trekked for 10 days to reach base camp, mixed his beats on a makeshift stone stage set against the spectacular backdrop of the world's highest mountains.

With brightly coloured Tibetan prayer flags fluttering overhead, climbers and trekkers danced as best they could in their heavy hiking boots and thick down jackets.

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HC verdict on judges' appointment today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court will deliver a verdict today on a seven-year-old writ petition that sought specific guidelines for selecting the persons for appointment of judges to the court.

The bench of Justice Obaidul Hassan and Justice Krishna Debnath yesterday fixed the date for announcing the judgement, as it concluded the hearing on the petition in August last year.

Supreme Court lawyer barrister Raghib Rauf Chowdhury filed the petition in June 2010, stating that the existing process of selection of people for the post of HC judges lacks transparency and

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DEATH OF RAUDHA
Family rejects college probe report

STAFF CORRESPONDENT,
Rajshahi

Police yesterday started investigating the murder case filed by Raudha's father Mohamed Athif with a Rajshahi court over the death of the Maldivian medical student and model.

Meanwhile, Athif has termed false the probe report of the Rajshahi Islami Bank Medical College that claimed the 21-year-old girl had

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PRAYER TIMING APRIL 13
Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4-35 12-45 4-45 6-24 7-45
JAMAT 5-10 1-15 5-00 6-28 8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION



Workers offload watermelons from boats and take them to their warehouses in Waise Ghat in the capital yesterday. The summer fruit was shipped from Rangabali of southwestern district Patuakhali.

US-Russia ties worse under Trump: Putin

Tillerson, Lavrov begin tense talks in Moscow over Syria conflict

AFP, Moscow

Russian President Vladimir Putin said ties with the United States have deteriorated under the administration of Donald Trump as their top diplomats locked horns yesterday over the Syrian conflict.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson held several hours of talks with Russian counterpart Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov in Moscow in what he said was an attempt to narrow "areas of sharp difference", but Washington's envoy was kept waiting over whether he would meet Putin.

The powers are at odds over the fate of Moscow's long-time ally President Bashar al-Assad, a rift exacerbated after an alleged Syrian chemical attack last week that triggered a punitive US missile strike.

Russia has slammed Washington's attack on a Syrian airbase and, as the top diplomats met, Putin admitted that relations between Washington and Moscow have worsened in the three months that Trump has been in office.

"You can say that the level of trust on a working level, especially on the military side, has not improved but most likely worsened," Putin said in the transcript of an interview with Mir television released by the Kremlin.

At the start of his meeting with Lavrov, Tillerson said he



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