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REGD. NO. DA 781 | VOL. XXVII No. 261 | ASHWIN 26, 1424 BS | MUHARRAM 20, 1439 HIRI | 20 PAGES PRICE: Tk 12.00

## Battling to bear high living cost

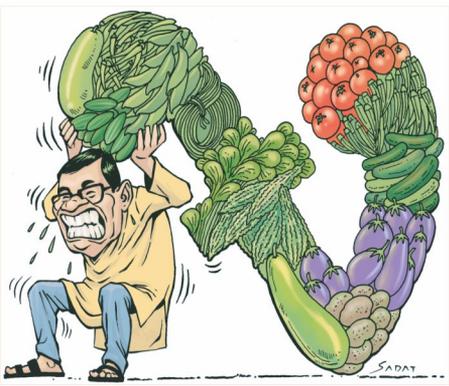
People of low and fixed income hit hard by soaring prices of essentials

**SHEL PARVEZ**  
 Over the last few months, Rupali Akter, the breadwinner of a five-member family in Savar's industrial belt, had to buy some of the essentials on a credit from nearby groceries. With a monthly income of Tk 10,000 including overtime, the sewing operator at a garment factory is unable to pay for all the products she buys, as prices of essentials -- from rice to vegetables -- has been on the rise. "I used to buy a 50-kg sack of rice at a time to meet the monthly need of my family. Now, I can afford to buy only 10 to 20 kg because of exorbitant prices of the staple," she told this correspondent.

Rice prices reached a record high last month in the wake of crop losses due to recurrent floods, dwindling public stock and slow release of rice and paddy by a section of unscrupulous millers and wholesalers. The prices, however, came down slightly in the last two weeks. Yet, the retail price of coarse rice, consumed by the poor and low-income people, remains Tk 46-50 a kg in the capital, according to the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh. "Survival has become tough for workers like us due to soaring prices of essentials. We want the prices to fall so that we can live a better life," said Rupali.

Rupali said she bought rice for Tk 35-40 a kg early this year, but now the same quantity of rice costs Tk 50. Moreover, soaring prices of vegetables have added to her financial woes. "I have to buy less than what my family needs," said Rupali, one of the nearly 40 lakh workers in the apparel industry, the country's biggest export earner. She pointed out that the price of all vegetables is now above Tk 50 a kg. But early this year, the same vegetable could be bought for

Tk 20-30 a kg. She is among the millions in the low and fixed-income group that has been bearing the brunt of spiralling prices of essentials and soaring costs of living. An estimate by citizen's forum Bangladesh Sadharan Nagorik Somaj (BSNS) shows that the monthly cost of a basket of commodities of a small family has shot up by 76 per cent to Tk 11,095 in October from Tk 6,255 in January this year. "But income has not increased in keeping



## Bogra Tufan, 12 others charged

**A CORRESPONDENT, Bogra**  
 Bogra police yesterday pressed charges against 13 people including Stramik League leader Tufan Sarkar, over the rape of a college student and the subsequent torture of the victim and her mother nearly three months ago.



Ten, including Tufan, were charged in the rape case while the same 10 along with three others were also charged with torturing the girl and her mother.

Inspector Abul Kalam Azad of Bogra Sadar Police Station, also the investigation officer of both cases, submitted the charge sheets to the court of judicial magistrate Mohammad Kamruzzaman at around 6:45pm, police said.

On July 17, Tufan Sarkar, convener of Bogra unit of the ruling Awami League's worker front, abducted the girl from her home and raped her and then asked his party cadres and a woman councillor to make sure the crimes were covered up.

Later, they picked up the student and her mother, tortured them for four hours and then shaved their heads.

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Myanmar men install a barbed-wire fence along the border with Ghumdhum of Naikhyangchhari yesterday, yards away from some Rohingya refugees in no-man's land. Several refugees claimed that Myanmar security forces were also laying landmines in the area. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## 6,300 in no-man's land for 45 days

Sunday's boat capsized toll rises to 23

**MOHAMMAD AL-MASLUM MOLLA and MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAT from Cox's Bazar**  
 Some 6,300 Rohingya people, mostly women and children, have been stuck in no-man's land along the Naikhyangchhari border since August 27.

Crossing the Myanmar border, the refugees from 1,370 families of 15 villages in Rakhine State's Maungdaw have built makeshift shelters by the Tambru canal near Tambru Bazar in Chumdhum. Visiting the area around yesterday afternoon, these correspondents saw men in uniform and civilian clothes patrolling with firearms.

Some were digging the ground. They are "security personnel laying land mines", according to the Rohingyas. The movement of Myanmar army and Border Guard Police (BGP) near the border is so frequent that one can see them

standing just for an hour on the Bangladesh side. Some Rohingya community leaders are not yet willing to leave the place. Taking a "wait and see" approach, they stay in touch with people on the other side of the border for updates on their properties.

Others, however, want to go to Balukhali in Utkhla, where most of the Myanmar citizens arriving since late August are staying in makeshift camps. There is no coordination committee for the refugees in the no-man's land. Officials of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) provide them with medicine and relief materials regularly. A few are allowed to cross the knee-deep canal to go to Tambru Bazar to buy supplies, when needed. They have to return after the shopping.

Asked about the stranded Rohingyas, Monzurul Hassan Khan, director of Cox's Bazar BGB Battalion-34, said, "We

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## TIES WITH BANGLADESH Myanmar stays indifferent: FM

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**  
 Myanmar has been unresponsive to Bangladesh's efforts to improve bilateral ties over the last two years, Foreign Minister AH Mahmood Ali said yesterday.

Dhaka stepped up efforts to enhance friendship and cooperation with Naypyidaw since the formation of the democratic government by the National League of Democracy (NLD) in March 2016, he said. As part of this endeavour, Bangladesh's foreign secretary visited Myanmar as the goodwill ambassador of the prime minister on June 30-July 1 last year.

Besides, Sheikh Hasina met Myanmar's State Counsellor Aung San Suu Kyi on the sideline of the UN General Assembly in New York and of BRICS-BANISTEC Summit

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**ROHINGYA INFLUX 5,20,000 AND COUNTING**

A child gets cholera vaccine at a Rohingya refugee camp in Utkhla of Cox's Bazar yesterday amid fears of a cholera outbreak there.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Fear of HIV spread grows

**MOHAMMAD AL-MASLUM MOLLA and MOHAMMAD ALI JINNAT from Cox's Bazar**

Health officials in Cox's Bazar fear spread of HIV/AIDS in the refugee camps as a rising number of Rohingyas have been diagnosed with the disease.

So far, 19 patients, mostly males, have been identified. One of them died since the Rohingya influx began on August 25, according to Cox's Bazar Civil Surgeon office.

More than five lakh Rohingyas have fled violence in Rakhine State of Myanmar into Bangladesh that was already hosting over 3 lakh Rohingyas before the recent influx. The

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## Massive cholera immunisation campaign starts

**STAFF CORRESPONDENT**

A massive cholera immunisation campaign started in Cox's Bazar yesterday to protect the newly-arrived Rohingyas and host communities from the life-threatening diarrhoeal disease.

As many as 900,000 doses of the vaccine have been mobilised and are being delivered by more than 200 mobile vaccination teams, making it the second largest oral cholera vaccination campaign ever, says a press release from the Unicef.

The campaign, which is led by the health ministry

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## BLUE WHALE CHALLENGE

### Simply a sick online game

**MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN and SHAHEEN MULLAH**  
 With many parents oblivious to the online game, it has literally been taking the lives of teenagers across the world for the last few years and the game has reached Bangladesh. The game, believed to have been developed in Russia in 2013, has become one of the most controversial online games worldwide and has been blamed for suicides of more than 130 teenagers, according to a report of the *Hindustan Times*.



The game "Blue Whale Challenge" gives a player 50 days, with one mission for each day, to complete all 50 levels. It starts off with innocent things like watching a horror movie at 4:30 in the morning but eventually moves on to horrifying missions, like killing an animal, self mutilation and talking drugs.

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