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RECORD GDP GROWTH

Bangladesh's economy may expand 7.65pc in fiscal 2018

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GOLD COAST BUZZ

C'wealth Games set to start in Queensland today

PAGE 14

SHIFT IN POLICY?

Saudi crown prince backs Israelis' 'right' to homeland

PAGE 8

Paying for own land!

Govt to spend Tk 607cr on recovery of canals, acquisition of land grabbed by influentials

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and TAWFIQUE ALI

They were once government land. But over the years powerful people occupied them and built establishments on them as they liked. Now the government wants to reclaim them with taxpayers' money.

With most of the surviving 26 city canals under illegal occupation and clogged with solid wastes, the government has taken up a Tk 607-cr project for land acquisition and excavation of five canals to ease the capital's waterlogging problem.

The five canals are Hazaribagh, Baishteki, Sangbadaik Colony, Begunbari and Manda Khal flowing through the two Dhaka city corporations.

Over 82 percent of the money will be spent on acquisition of 30.5 acres of "private land" and the rest on compensation for structures, excavation and bank development.

Excavation of a new canal, named Kurmitola, on 4.5-acre private land in the up and down stream of Hazaribagh Khal is also under the scheme. The Kurmitola canal will drain out the rainwater of

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Dumping of waste and encroachment by unscrupulous people into the Ramchandrapur canal have left the waterway in a sorry state. There is hardly any flow of water in the canal now. The photo was taken in the city's Mohammadpur area yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

It's based on 'fake news'

BNP bins graft allegation against its leaders; accuses AL of running 'dubious news portals'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP yesterday alleged that the Anti-Corruption Commission began examining the bank accounts of its top leaders on the basis of fake reports by news portals run by the Awami League.

According to the party, 25 such dubious portals were spreading propaganda against it for tarnishing its image. It, however, did not name any of them.

"BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia has been jailed in a false case. Although she secured bail from the High Court, she is not being released over different excuses. Party's acting chairman Tarique Rahman is abroad while Secretary General Mirza Fakhru Islam is hospitalised," said BNP Standing Committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain.

"In such a situation, false and fabricated news is being published against BNP leaders. The ACC's announcement of launching the enquiry is nothing but an attempt to tarnish the image of the senior BNP leaders," he told a press briefing at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters.

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SAMSUNG MOBILE Locally made sets to hit market soon

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

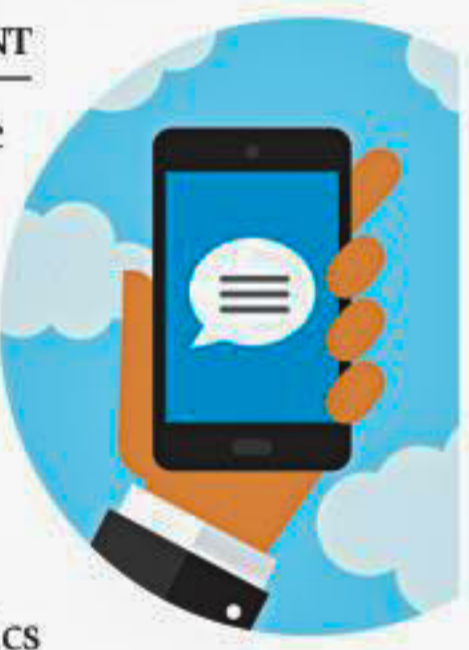
Consumers would be buying made-in-Bangladesh Samsung 4G phones ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr in June and they would be more affordable.

Samsung's local partner Fair Electronics Ltd yesterday inaugurated a new 58,000sqft manufacturing plant in Narsingdi that would be making the phones.

Initially, entry-level and mid-range phones would be built there and gradually higher end phones. All the parts for the phones would be provided by Samsung and it would also ensure quality.

The South Korean giant has eight phone

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Reimpose sanctions against Myanmar

PM's adviser tells int'l conference on Rohingya crisis; Dhaka Declaration calls for safe, dignified repatriation of refugees

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Prime Minister's Foreign Affairs Adviser Gowher Rizvi has called for re-imposition of sanctions against Myanmar as a way to put pressure on the Southeast Asian country accused of genocide.

"We have to re-impose the sanction because the sanction was removed as a good will and a gesture of good behaviour to come from Myanmar," he said.

He said the sanctions against Myanmar's military regime were withdrawn following the emergence of democracy in the country.

Eventually, it resulted in the end of Myanmar's isolation from the rest of the world. Foreign investment was also made in the country.

Rizvi said he wondered why mass kill-

ings, genocide and ethnic cleansing took place at a time when the world was supporting Myanmar.

"So there is no longer time to debate if sanctions work or not," he said at the conclusion of a two-day international conference yesterday.

BRAC University, Centre for Genocide Studies of Dhaka University and ActionAid Bangladesh, an NGO, jointly organised the conference on "Rohingya Refugee Crisis: Towards Sustainable Solutions" at the Nabab Nawab Ali Chowdhury Senate Hall of Dhaka University.

The conference adopted a 16-point Dhaka Declaration, calling upon the international community to ensure voluntary, dignified and safe return of the Rohingyas,

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Myanmar agrees to UNSC visit

But council's access to Rakhine State still remains unclear

AFP, United Nations

Myanmar has agreed to a visit by the UN Security Council after months of resistance, but it remains unclear whether ambassadors will be allowed to go to Rakhine State, the body's president said Monday.

Nearly 700,000 Rohingyas have been driven out of Rakhine state and are living in crowded refugee camps in Bangladesh since a Myanmar army operation in August.

After the council proposed a visit in February, Myanmar's government said it was "not the right time," but it has now given the green light.

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Banks now to get cheaper BB funds

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Bank has made funds cheaper for all banks by reducing its repo rate by 75 basis points to 6 percent.

The decision was made yesterday, a couple of days after the BB slashed the cash reserve requirement or CRR by one percentage point to 5.5 percent.

Both the decisions will take effect on April 15, according to two circulars issued by the central bank yesterday.

The BB, however, kept the reverse repo rate unchanged at 4.75 percent.

Repo is a short-term fund that the central bank gives to commercial banks in case of cash shortfall, while reverse repo is excess money that banks keep with the central bank.

The BB has already faced severe criticism from different quarters over its decision to cut the CRR. The decision came on Sunday after Finance Minister AMA Muhiht held a meeting with BB Governor Fazle Kabir and directors of private banks.

A number of experts told this newspaper yesterday that the BB decisions go against the monetary policy and may hurt the depositors' interest. This will push up money supply in the market and may subsequently increase defaulted loans further.

The BB circular on the CRR said that on average, banks will have to keep with the BB 5.5 percent of their clients' deposits on bi-weekly basis and 5 percent on daily basis.

Talking to The Daily Star, AB Mirza Azizul Islam, former finance adviser to

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No MCQ in pry exams this year

STAR REPORT

Primary and Mass Education Minister Mostafizur Rahman yesterday said the government has decided to drop Multiple Choice Question from Primary Education Completion (PEC) exams from this year.

"We have decided to drop the MCQ from the next PEC examinations. The decision came following recommendations of educationalists to prevent question leaks in public examinations," he told a press conference at his secretariat office in the capital.

The ministry organised the press briefing to announce the results of PEC scholarship exams, reports BSS.

Mostafizur said there would be no problem in doing away with MCQ as the next PEC exams would be held in November.

Primary and Mass Education Secretary Asif-uz-Zaman, additional

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Farmers harvesting paddy in Sunamganj's Dakshin Sunamganj upazila yesterday. Growers in Sylhet's haor region are eyeing a bumper yield of paddy this season after losing crops to flashfloods in the last two years.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Smiles after two years

No flash floods this season; farmers in Sylhet haors begin Boro harvesting

DWOHA CHOWDHURY, Sylhet

Farmers in the haor region of Sylhet division are eyeing a bumper paddy harvest this season after floods devastated their farmlands two years in a row.

"We are seeing golden ripe paddy fields for the first time in two years. Some of us started harvesting already. The weather is nice," Akbar Hossain, a farmer in Sunamganj's Jamalganj upazila, told this correspondent.

His crops in the low-lying lands of Halir Haor area had gone under water by this time last year.

Since haor areas remain flooded throughout the monsoon months, the farmers mostly rely on the output of Boro season.

Days before the paddy was ready for harvest last year, flash floods washed away the crops. The farmers had the same fate in the year before that.

Many growers of the county's staple food recently shared Akbar Hossain's sentiment about the crop. They have started reaping their harvest from the haors in Sylhet, Sunamganj, and Habiganj districts.

According to the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Sylhet, paddy has been cultivated on 4,73,000 hectares of land in four districts of the division this year. In Sunamganj alone, paddy was harvested on 2,22,552 hectares of land.

Shwapan Kumar Saha, assistant director of DAE in Sunamganj, said harvesting in the fields would begin in full swing in about a week.

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