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Wired for development

Solar mini-grid brings reliable electricity to Jamuna river shoal

MIRZA SHAKIL with ANDREW EAGLE

Business was always a struggle in Rupsha Bazar, a market on a Jamuna River shoal in Sirajganj. For many years, small business operators were at the mercy of costly diesel to run generators for electricity. Then, in February 2017, local concern Solargaon Limited backed by the government-owned Infrastructure Development Company Limited (IDCOL) opened a Tk 5.14 crore solar power mini-grid that changed the area's economic outlook and transformed home life as well.

"I had to buy up to four litres of diesel per day to run my computer services business," says business proprietor Mokadess Ali Liton from Rupsha Bazar. "I had to start the generator only after a client arrived because I was struggling to bear the cost. Since the mini-grid came into service my business expenses have halved."

Haider Ali, the owner of an adjacent welding workshop has also benefited. "Although the electricity bills from the solar connection are higher than if we were on the national grid, it is still cheaper than diesel," he says.

The 130-kilowatt plant that occupies one acre of land uses solar panels and industrial battery storage to power nine kilometres of transmission line, connecting 474 subscribers.

"We service some 164 commercial and 310 household clients," says the project's manager Sohel Rana. "A whole range of businesses rely on our output, including battery-run auto-rickshaw fleets, farms, service and retail sector enterprises and workshops."

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5



Solar panels at Rupsharchar village in Sirajganj provide electricity to residents of the shoal in the middle of Jamuna river. The Tk-5.14 crore mini-grid is an initiative of Solargaon Limited supported by the government-owned Infrastructure Development Company Limited. The picture was taken last week.

PHOTO: MIRZA SHAKIL

Rape of 2 Marma girls Police yet to arrest 3 accused

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

Police have yet to arrest the three BGB men accused in a rape case in Lama upazila of the district.

However, they arrested Jonerun Tripura, an indigenous woman, who was accused of calling the Marma girls out of their homes and taking them to the alleged rapists. She was placed on a one-day remand by a court.

Zakir Hossain Majumder, superintendent of police in Bandarban, said police would decide whether to arrest the accused BGB men after receiving medical reports of the girls.

Two Marma girls, aged 12 and 17, were allegedly raped on Wednesday in a remote area of the upazila.

In a case filed on Friday with Lama Police Station, the girls said they were raped by BGB jawans Sumon and Maruf of Tiler Deva Camp in a bush not far from their village.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5

Free Shahidul immediately

426 academics in Australia urge govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As many as 426 academics from various universities in Australia on Friday urged the Government of Bangladesh to immediately release eminent photographer and social activist Shahidul Alam, who was picked up by law enforcers on August 5.

They also condemned the detention, alleged torture and proposed prosecution of Shahidul as well as the recent violence against students and journalists during protests for road safety, according to a statement.

The academics sent the statement to Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal. Copies were also sent to Australian High Commissioner to Bangladesh Julia Niblett and Bangladesh High Commissioner to Australia Mohammad Sufiur Rahman.

In the statement, they said Shahidul, also an adjunct faculty member of RMIT University in Australia, is a good friend of their country and an invaluable member of their academic community.

He has a global reputation as a

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

Trump braces for more troubles

US prosecutors grant Trump Organisation CFO immunity in Cohen probe

REUTERS, New York

Federal prosecutors have granted immunity to the Trump Organization's chief financial officer in an investigation involving US President Donald Trump's former personal lawyer, Michael Cohen, according to people familiar with the matter.

The immunity deal for the CFO, Allen Weisselberg, was first reported by the Wall Street Journal, which also reported he was called to testify before a federal grand jury earlier this year.

Weisselberg was given immunity months ago, one of the people familiar with the matter told Reuters. The source declined to provide further details.

A cooperation deal between Weisselberg and prosecutors could be damaging to the president given the CFO's longtime role in Trump's business affairs. Weisselberg has worked for the Trump family for more than four decades, including as treasurer for the Donald J. Trump Foundation, and is one of the people to whom Trump entrusted his business before taking office.

Rudy Giuliani, a lawyer for the president, said he did not know what Weisselberg had been questioned about. But Giuliani said Trump's legal team had been through the executive's business dealings and found nothing that could threaten the president.

"I know what he knows and none of it is of concern to us," said Giuliani. "There's nothing he has that would hurt."

Nicholas Biase, a spokesman for the US Attorney's Office in Manhattan, which has been leading the Cohen probe, declined to comment, as did the White House. The Trump Organization did not respond to a request for

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

Two 'robbers' killed in 'gunfight'

STAR REPORT

Two suspected robbers were killed in what police claimed was a gunfight between two gangs in Magura Sadar upazila yesterday.

In Chuadanga, a bullet-riddled body of the leader of an outlawed party was recovered yesterday, a day after he was allegedly picked up by a group of plainclothes men.

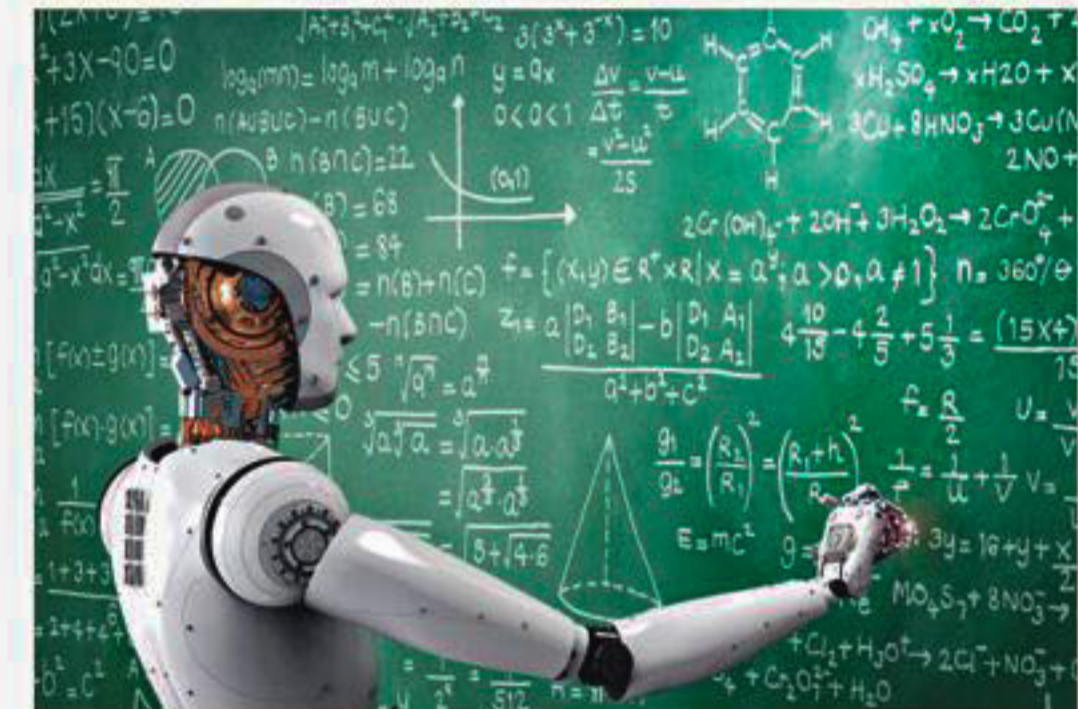
The deceased was identified as Abdul Bari Haq, 47, a top leader of outlawed Purbo Banglar Communist Party's (PBCP-ML) Janajuddha faction.

Son of Pouchu Sheikh, Bari hailed from Natipota village in Damurhuda upazila of Chuadanga.

Sukumar Biswas, officer-in-charge of Damurhuda police, said Bari was accused in 14 cases including four for murders and

SEE PAGE 10 COL 6

AI to teach English in Japan classes



AFP, Tokyo

English-speaking AI robots will be helping out in some 500 Japanese classrooms from next year as the country seeks to improve its English skills among both children and teachers.

The education ministry plans a pilot project costing around 250 million yen (\$227,000) to improve Japanese students' notoriously weak oral and written English, an official told AFP.

"AI robots already on the market have various functions. For example, they can check the pronunciation of each student's English, which is difficult for teachers to do," added the official in charge of international education, who asked not to be named.

AI robots "are just one example of the trial and

SEE PAGE 10 COL 4

Take in stranded migrants

UNHCR urges EU states

AFP, Rome

The UN's Refugee Agency yesterday called on EU member states to urgently agree to take in some of the 150 people stranded on an Italian coastguard ship, after a fresh immigration row erupted between the bloc and Italy's populist government.

Dozens of people have

SEE PAGE 10 COL 5



PRAYER TIMING AUGUST 26
Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4-30 12-45 4-45 6-33 8-00
JAMAAT 5-05 1-15 5-00 6-36 8-30
SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

Rivers of fish

Waterway fish farming a boon for Madaripur farmers

SUZIT KUMAR DAS with ANDREW EAGLE

The waterways in Madaripur's Shibchar upazila are proving to be an unexpected blessing for local fish farmers. Tilapia cultivation in rivers and waterholes is increasingly popular, with over 450 floating cages already taking advantage of this innovative and low-cost farming method.

"I saw a television programme about fish farming in cages, back in 2011," says Tanjil Ahmad, 48, from Sheikhpur village. "It made me decide to farm fish. I went to Chandpur for two weeks to observe it being done. When I returned, I started with thirty cages that same year."

Tanjil has since invested Tk 2.5 crore in his fish farm and earns up to Tk 30 lakh per annum from his 250 enclosures.

"Each cage is about 20 feet long, 10 feet wide and six feet deep," explains fellow fish farmer Khokon Talukder.

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1



Tilapia being cultivated in floating cages in Padma Beel in Madaripur's Shibchar upazila. Each cage, about 20 feet long, 10 feet wide and six feet deep, is proving to be effective to grow the fish. The picture was taken recently.

PHOTO: SUZIT KUMAR DAS

REFUGEE CAMPS IN BHASHAN CHAR Relocation process 'will start in Sept'

MOSTAFA YOUSUF, Cig

Bangladesh has planned to begin the relocation process of the Rohingya refugees, who fled the brutal military crackdown in Myanmar last year, from all refugee camps to Bhashan Char from September.

The relocation was supposed to take place before this year's monsoon, but was delayed as the char was not fully prepared for habitation, authorities concerned said.

At least 11 recommendations were made to be followed in the relocation process in a meeting held in Chittagong this month, joined by high-ups from the Prime Minister's Office and from district administrations and divisional commissioners' offices of Noakhali, Cox's Bazar and Chittagong.

One of the recommendations said that the relocation must begin and has to be completed between September to March. The authorities concerned also agreed that September to March was a safe period for seafaring.

The government will seek help from those in-charge at the camps, and the Refugee Relief and Repatriation Commissioner (RRRC) to motivate the refugees to relocate.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority and Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation would be tasked with the normalisation of commuting to and from the char through a launch service and the setting up of a jetty at Bhashan Char.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1