



THE KANCHPUR-MEGHNA-GUMTI BRIDGES ARE BEING BUILT WITH HIGHLY DUCTILE GRADE 420 BSRM ULTIMA BARS



TOURIST DESTINATIONS

Air tickets difficult to come by

Holidaymakers eye on New Year, Christmas, extended public holiday

RASHIDUL HASAN

Air tickets for domestic and international tourist destinations have become scarce since the middle of this month, due to the ongoing rush of holidaymakers.

The New Year, Christmas and school vacation coupled with extended government holidays in patches have prompted people to take aerial routes to holiday in tourist destinations with their near and dear ones.

Different airlines are happily counting the windfall profit claiming that holidaymakers nowadays prefer travelling by air to road to avoid hassle and save time.

The state-run Biman Bangladesh Airlines and three private carriers -- US-Bangla Airlines, Novo Air and Regent Airways -- said 90 percent tickets to Cox's Bazar, Sylhet, Chattogram and Barishal routes till the second week of January 2019 have already been booked or sold out.

Tickets to popular international destinations -- Thailand, Malaysia, India, Singapore and London -- have also been booked or sold out till the middle of January, they claimed.

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A teenage boy cries yesterday after finding his relatives among the ruins of his house which was hit by the tsunami in Pandeglang, Indonesia.

PHOTO: REUTERS

INDONESIA TSUNAMI

Hunt on for survivors as toll tops 370

128 still missing

AFP, Carita

Dozens of filled body bags were hauled away from buildings flattened by Indonesia's volcano-triggered tsunami yesterday, as the death toll climbed to 373 and search teams pushed on with the grim hunt for corpses.

Rescue teams used their bare hands, diggers and other heavy equipment to haul debris from the stricken area around the Sunda Strait, as thousands were evacuated to higher ground.

Experts warned that more deadly waves could slam the devastated region after Saturday night's disaster, as questions swirled over why the killer wave caught a disaster-prone country's monitors completely off guard.

The powerful tsunami swept over popular beaches on southern Sumatra and western Java and inundated

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FROM CAMPAIGN TRAIL

MUNSHIGANJ

LAKSHMIPUR

AL pacifies rebel, BNP pinned down on its own turf

MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN
from Munshiganj

The tussle in the Awami League camp of Munshiganj-3 seems to have subsided following a rebel campaigning for the nominee.

The BNP's electioneering, however, is hardly visible there.

With only five days until the nation goes to polls, AL candidate Mrinal Kanti Das is carrying out a steady campaign with almost no opposition on the campaign trail, said locals.

Although Mrinal's posters were seen on most roads in Munshiganj sadar and Gazaria upazilas, he was not being able to intensify his campaign because of AL rebel Chowdhury Fahria Afrin, said party insiders.

Fahria, wife of Munshiganj Municipality Mayor Mohammad Faisal, had plenty of her posters around the municipality office. Her father-in-law Md Mohiuddin is the president of Munshiganj

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RAFIUL ISLAM back from Lakshmipur

The BNP has virtually been sidelined in its Lakshmipur stronghold while its rival Awami League's campaigning has been going on in full swing.

Posters and campaigning by the Jatiya Oikyafront, the alliance of which the BNP is a component, can hardly be seen anywhere in the four constituencies of the district.

During a recent visit, The Daily Star spoke to 40 voters in Lakshmipur-3 and Lakshmipur-1 and talked to sources in the other two.

"The scenario is quite unusual. An eerie calm is prevailing. We fear violence in the days ahead," said 45-year old Mohammad Harun, a rickshaw puller of Sadar upazila under Lakshmipur-3.

"The district is a base of the BNP, but the party is cornered," said another local at a tea stall.

Their fears seem logical as BNP leaders have said they would take to the street on polls day to stop "vote rigging".

Since 1991, the BNP bagged all the seats in the district, except once (Lakshmipur-4 in 1996). The BNP did not take part in the 2014 polls.

Jatiya Samajtantrik Dal Chief ASM Abdur Rab, who defeated the BNP candidate in 1996, is running this year as a candidate of the Jatiya Oikyafront.

Rezaul Karim Liton, general secretary of the district Jubo Dal, alleged that

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Singer Dwijen Mukhopadhyay passes away

STAR REPORT

The world of music has lost another one of its much-revered artistes, Dwijen Mukhopadhyay whose contributions have enriched it for more than half a century.

The legendary artiste passed away at the age of 91, in his Salt Lake residence in Kolkata around 1:30pm yesterday.

Born in 1927, Mukhopadhyay recorded over 1,000 Tagore songs, the first being "Tumi kyamon kore gaan koro hey guni" in 1951.

The Rabindra Sangeet

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Nasa probe hurtles toward historic flyby



AFP, Tampa

A Nasa spacecraft is hurtling toward a historic New Year's Day flyby of the most distant planetary object ever studied, a frozen relic of the early solar system called Ultima Thule.

Four billion miles (6.4 billion kilometers) away, the unmanned spaceship, New Horizons, is poised to zoom by at 12:33 am (0533 GMT) on January 1, at a distance of just 2,200 miles (3,500 kilometers) from Ultima Thule.

That's more than three times closer than New Horizons came to Pluto when it zipped by the dwarf planet in 2015.

So what is this strange object, which is named after a mythical, far-northern island in medieval literature and has its own rock anthem performed by Queen guitarist Brian May?

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NATIONAL POLLS

Mobile internet may be slowed down for 3 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The mobile internet may be downgraded on the election day as well as the day before and after it, said officials who attended a meeting at the Election Commission yesterday.

The EC asked Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission to make preparations to downgrade 4G and 3G networks to 2G in those three days, meeting sources said.

Last week, EC Secretary Helal Uddin Ahmed

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PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 25

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5-25 12-45 3-45 5-24 7-00
JAMAAT 6-00 1-15 4-00 5-27 7-30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

INT'L POLLS OBSERVERS

US slams govt foot-dragging on issuing visas

AFP, Washington

The United States has urged Bangladesh to do more to ensure a free election, blaming government foot-dragging on issuing visas for the cancellation of an international monitoring mission.

The Asian Network for Free Elections, an observation group funded by the US, called off its mission for next Sunday's vote after Bangladesh did not promptly grant visas and credentials, the State Department said.

State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said the United States was "disappointed" by Bangladesh's "inability" to provide visas in time and called on Dhaka to ensure that local non-governmental organizations receive credentials to monitor the vote.

Any democratic election must have "space for peaceful expression and assembly, for independent media

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A baby Jesus doll being placed at a nativity scene at the capital's Kakrail Church on Christmas Eve yesterday. Christians all over the world are celebrating their biggest religious festival today commemorating the birth of Jesus Christ.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

Ousted Pak PM sent back to jail

Anti-corruption court hands Sharif seven-year prison term for graft

AFP, Islamabad

Former Pakistani leader Nawaz Sharif was sentenced to seven years in prison for corruption yesterday, state media reported, the latest conviction in a series of allegations which saw him ousted from power last year.

Sharif, a three-time prime minister, has denied all the charges against him and claims he is being targeted by the country's powerful security establishment.

Yesterday's conviction, centred on family businesses in the Middle East, is his second stemming from a corruption investigation spurred by the Panama Papers leak, and comes as new Prime Minister Imran Khan has vowed to tackle endemic graft in Pakistan.

He was taken into custody and was sent to Adiala jail. Sharif was also fined 1.5 billion rupees (\$10.8 million), according to state-run Pakistan Television.

Security was tight at the court, with some scuffles breaking out between Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) supporters and security forces, who responded with tear gas.

Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, who succeeded Sharif as prime minister last year, said the PML-N would appeal the verdict but would "not resort to violence".

"The people of Pakistan and history will not accept this decision," he told reporters in Islamabad.

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