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"There has been an unnecessary scandal over onion price... it shouldn't happen to rice."
FOOD MINISTER SADHAN CHANDRA MAJUMDAR TO RICE MILL OWNERS (PAGE 3)



"Weather in Bangladesh is turning unpredictable due to an increase in global temperature."
CLIMATE AND WATER RESOURCES EXPERT PROF AINUN NISHAT AT A DISCUSSION (PAGE 3)



"We have made this decision as an act of goodwill to contribute to an environment conducive to diplomacy and the advancement of peace."
US DEFENCE SECRETARY MARK ESPER AFTER POSTPONING US-SOUTH KOREA JOINT MILITARY DRILL (PAGE 8)



7 killed as gas blast rips apart Ctg house

All of them pedestrians; walls fell on them; 15 others hurt in the explosion

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN and MOHAMMED SUMAN, Ctg

Julekha Khanam Farzana told her younger son Atifur Rahman that she would come back to pick him up from school after dropping his elder brother at tutor's house in Chattogram city's Patharghata area.

Standing next to Farzana, her elder son Atikur Rahman waved goodbye to his brother. None of them knew it was the last time they would see each other.

Both Farzana, 30, and Atikur, 8, were crushed to death under rubble on the way to the tutor's house as concrete walls fell on them following a massive explosion of a gas pipeline at a house on Patharghata Brickfield Road yesterday morning.

Apart from them, five others were killed and at least 15 wounded. All the dead were pedestrians.

The explosion took place on the ground floor of a five-storey building owned by Dharmapal Barua on the Brickfield Road around 8:40am.

Fire service officials and explosives experts said a leak in gas pipeline at the building caused the explosion that led to the collapse of the house's front wall and its boundary wall.

Three roadside shops and two buildings

nearby were damaged in the blast. Fire fighters made the residents of the five-storey building vacate it, saying it was risky to stay there.

Chattogram Development Authority (CDA) officials said a gas pipeline riser was installed inside the house in violation of the building code. And this led to the accident.

Of the other five dead, four were identified as Anny Barua, 38, head teacher of a school; Nurul Islam, 30, a day labourer; Shukkur, 40, a rickshaw puller; and Md Selim, 40, a rickshaw-van puller.

The injured are receiving treatment at Chattogram Medical College Hospital.

Anny was the head teacher of Meherati Government Primary School in Patiya upazila. She lived on the sixth floor of a building around 200 yards from the scene.

Her uncle Mridul Barua said, "Anny had PSC exam duty at the school ... She used to use another road to go to the school every day, but today she took the Brickfield Road to pick up one of her colleagues and met the tragic end."

"She left behind her two school-going sons and husband Polash Kanti Barua, an engineer of Power Development Board in

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Atifur Rahman breaks down in tears, yet reaches out a hand to his father, possibly to console the grieving man. Atifur lost his mother and his elder eight-year-old brother in the explosion in Chattogram's Patharghata Brickfield Road yesterday. Inset, firefighters survey the damage from the explosion.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN/ COLLECTED

Defaulters can now apply for fresh loans

Need to make 15pc down payment

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Defaulters eligible for easy rescheduling facility will also be allowed to take out fresh loans by providing a down payment of 15 percent of their outstanding loans – a development that has drawn the ire of different quarters.

The development comes after the central bank yesterday issued a notice in line with a verdict given by the High Court on November 4.

Prior to that, the central bank asked banks on September 3 to suspend fresh loan disbursement to defaulters following another High Court order.

As per the relaxed central bank policy issued on May 16, defaulters will be allowed to reschedule their classified loans by making a down payment of only 2 percent instead of the existing 10-50 percent.

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Biman signs deal to buy 2 more 787s

PM joins Dubai Airshow UNB, Dhaka

Boeing and Biman Bangladesh Airlines signed a deal for two 787-9s aircraft, which list at \$292.5 million apiece.

The deal was signed during the Dubai Airshow 2019.

Biman already has in its fleet four 787-8s of the US plane maker and the new planes would be 20 feet longer.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday joined the opening ceremony of the airshow, one of the largest aviation exhibitions in the world, and enjoyed a flying display.

The five-day airshow would continue until November 21 at the Dubai World Central (DWC) with the participation of some

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Onion prices fall slightly

Farmers start early harvest

STAR REPORT

Amid public concern, prices of onions have slightly dropped in retail and wholesale markets across the country as a locally grown variety of the cooking ingredient started hitting the market.

Price of different varieties of onion fell by Tk 30-40 both in retail and wholesale markets in the capital.

Visiting markets in the capital's Karwanbazar, Mirpur, and Shyambazar, The Daily Star correspondent yesterday found that the local onions were being sold at Tk 200-220 per kg, onions imported from Myanmar at Tk 170-190 per kg, and onions imported from Egypt at Tk 150-180 per kg.

The same varieties were sold between Tk 200 to Tk 250 in these markets the previous day.

In Chattogram, onion prices dropped by Tk 15-20 in wholesale and retail markets.

Myanmarese onions were being sold at Tk 180 per kg at Kazir Deuri kitchen market. The same variant was sold for Tk 200 on Saturday.

Meanwhile, in Pabna, prices of onion have dropped by Tk 3,000-4,000 per maund (about 37.5kg) after farmers began harvesting Mulakata, a locally grown variety of the bulb, at least a month before schedule.

Amid soaring price of onions, farmers started reaping

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ROAD TRANSPORT ACT

Enforcement a stiff challenge

Law takes effect with issues crucial to proper implementation still unresolved

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY and WASIM BIN HABIB

After much delay and drama, the Road Transport Act-2018 finally came into force yesterday.

But enforcing the act with stricter punishment for traffic offences will be difficult for the authorities aiming to reduce deaths on roads and ensure traffic discipline. The issue involves myriad unresolved problems.

The authorities seem to have relied solely on this act without addressing the problems in road engineering, and traffic education.

Inadequate infrastructure, logistics, and shortage of human resources are still there. The government will have to negotiate with the transport associations that have already demanded repeal of several sections of the act, delaying the process of enforcing the law.

The associations, mostly led by people close to the ruling party, often stand in the way of implementation of government directives and

court orders.

There are about 42.17 lakh registered vehicles in the country and the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority has issued around 23 lakh driving licences since its inception.

There are many drivers without licences. The government will have to bring those drivers to the licencing process immediately. Under the new law, drivers without licences will be sentenced to six months in prison or fined Tk 25,000 or both.

Owners of unregistered vehicles will be sentenced to six months in jail or fined Tk 50,000 or both.

Currently, there are an estimated 10-12 lakh unregistered battery-and engine-run three-wheelers and other vehicles across the country. These vehicles are largely responsible for frequent crashes, experts say.

Questions remain as to how the authorities will

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Café attack verdict on Nov 27

COURT CORRESPONDENT

A tribunal in Dhaka has set November 27 for delivery of the verdict in a case filed in connection with the Holey Artisan Café attack that left 22 people, including 17 foreigners, dead in 2016.

All eight accused in the case, now in jail, were produced before the court yesterday when Judge Md Majibur Rahman of the Anti-Terrorism Special Tribunal of Dhaka set the date.

During closing arguments, the prosecution told the tribunal that they were able to prove the charges against the eight and sought capital punishment for all of them.

The defence sought acquittals for their clients saying the charges were brought based on confessional statements of six accused which could not be trusted.

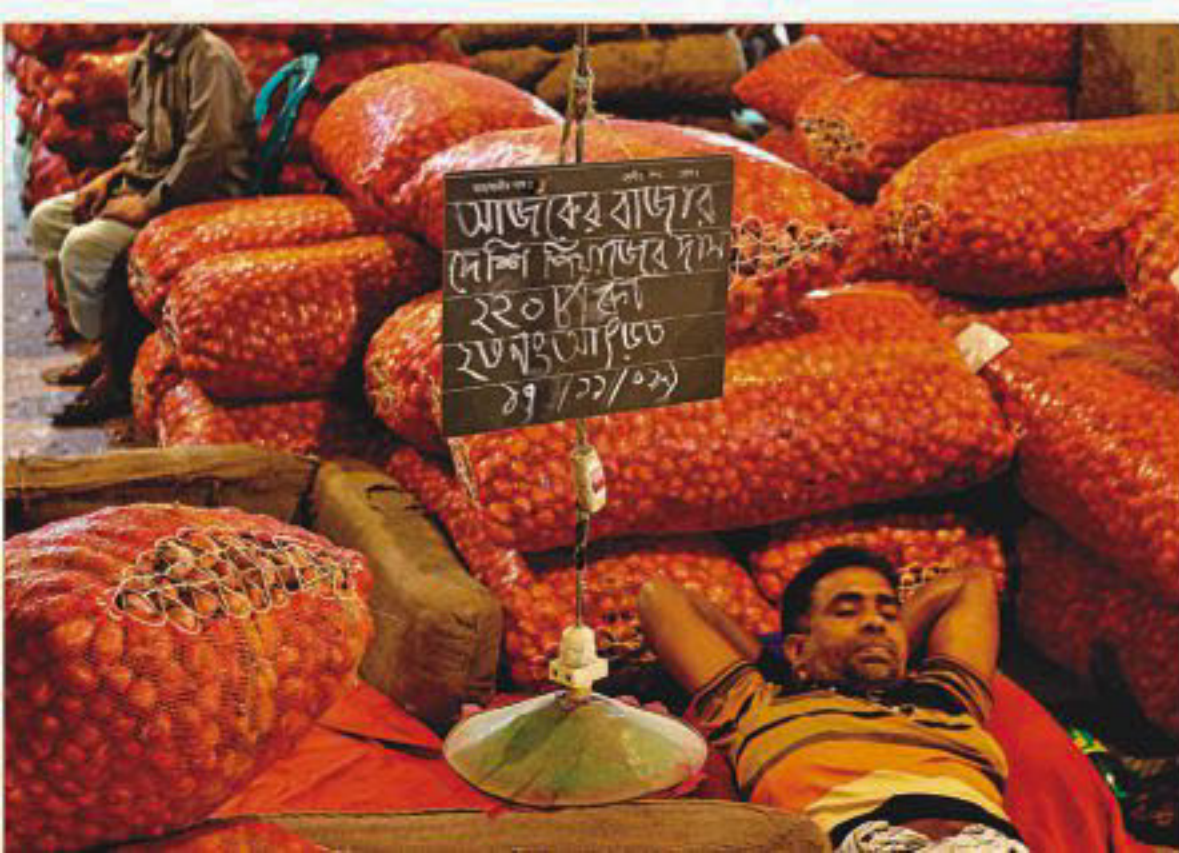
Earlier, the tribunal recorded statements of 113 prosecution witnesses.

During the trial, several eyewitnesses, including the wife of Hasnat Reza Karim who was a teacher of North South

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PHOTO: PALASH KHAN/ ANISUR RAHMAN



Top, buyers examine onion plants for sale at Tk 100 a kg at a market in the capital's Mirpur. Such plants would sell for Tk 20-30 last year. Bottom, an onion trader naps next to his wares. At around Tk 220 per kg, the high price of onions has dissuaded customers from buying the spice. The photos were taken yesterday.