

Driver, 2 others responsible

Says probe body on B'baria train accident

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

A second investigation committee has also held the driver, his assistant and the guard of Turna Nishita Express responsible for the fatal train accident in Brahmanbaria, that left 18 passengers dead and many others injured.

"Violation of signals caused the accident and we found them responsible," a member of the probe committee, led by Additional Secretary Rafiqul Islam of the railways ministry, told The Daily Star yesterday.

"The driver told us that when the train reached near the home signal [just outside Mandobagh Railway Station in Kasba], he realised that he had crossed the outer signal [640 yards behind the home signal]," the committee member said, wishing anonymity.

The driver then applied the brakes, but it was too late, he added. Asked whether the driver and his assistant had dozed off, the official said they could not confirm it as there was no CCTV camera inside the cabin. The three didn't admit it either.

The four-member committee, formed by the railways ministry, submitted the report to the ministry on Sunday with several recommendations on stopping recurrence of such accidents, he said.

Earlier, another five-member committee, led by Nasir Uddin, divisional transport officer (Chattogram), also found the driver, his assistant and the guard responsible for the accident.

Soon after the accident, Bangladesh Railway suspended Turna Nishita driver Taser Uddin, his assistant Apu Dey and guard Abdur Rahman over violating signals.

The accident occurred early on November 12 when the Dhaka-bound Turna Nishita rammed Chattogram-bound Udayan Express at Mandobagh Railway Station in Kasba. At least 18 passengers died in the accident. Of them, two died of their injuries on Saturday and Sunday.

A top railway official, who has knowledge about the ongoing investigations, said a train driver has to follow a caution board which stands 440 yards off the outer signal on a single-track line.

After coming across the caution board, the driver will see the outer signal. The caution board and the outer signal are 440 yards apart. If the

driver finds the outer signal green, he will go ahead and see the home signal. "In case of the Kasba accident, the investigators found that both the outer and home signals were red, meaning the driver had to stop before the outer signal, but he didn't," the official said wishing anonymity.

The average permissible speed limit on the track was around 70 km/h, but the Turna Nishita was running at around 25 km/h when the accident occurred, meaning the driver had applied on the brakes, but it was too late, he added.

MINISTER TO DISCLOSE PROBE FINDINGS

Talking to The Daily Star, Railways Secretary Mofazzel Hossain yesterday said the railways ministry received reports from two probe committees.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujjan would brief the media on Wednesday about the probe findings, he said.

Another four-member investigation committee, headed by Chief Operating Superintendent (East) Nazmul Islam, is expected to submit its report today, BR Director General Md Shamsuzzaman said.

The probe body, formed by the Brahmanbaria district administration, was supposed to file its report within Sunday.

But the committee, headed by Additional District Magistrate Mitu Mariyam, sought more time as they could not talk to any railway staff involved in the accident yet, the ADM told this correspondent yesterday.

The railways ministry also asked the government railway inspector to probe the incident and submit a report.

TWO MORE DIE

Two people, who were injured in the November 12 train accident, died of their wounds in Dhaka and Sylhet on Saturday and Sunday, raising the death toll to 18.

The victims were identified as Tara Horizon, 45, of Maizdi Horizon Colony in Noakhali and Dholai Miah, 65, of Bublakhali area in Habiganj.

Tara died at Combined Military Hospital in Dhaka on Saturday, the BR DG said.

Dholai Miah died at the ICU of Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College Hospital on Sunday, reports our Sylhet correspondent.

Besides, 24 other injured were still undergoing treatment at different hospitals.

Woman dies 2 weeks after C-section goes wrong

She got infected as doctor left gauze in her abdomen

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A woman, who underwent a C-section at a private hospital in Rangpur two weeks ago, died at Rangpur Medical College Hospital on Sunday as cotton gauze bandages were left inside her abdomen during the operation.

Nasima Begum, 26, was the wife of Rashidul Islam from Mirganj Tapat area in Rangpur city.

Rashidul said Nasima was admitted to Rose Hospital in Dhap area on November 5.

She gave birth to a baby boy the same day after a team of doctors had performed a surgery, he said, adding that her wife was released from the hospital two days later.

After returning home, the new mother started complaining of a pain in her abdomen that became slightly swollen, Rashidul said, adding that he took her to the same hospital again on Tuesday as her pain grew unbearable.

A doctor at the hospital prescribed her some medicines without diagnosing the patient, he said.

However, he could not name the doctor.

As Nasima's condition deteriorated, family members on Saturday took her to Rangpur medical where doctors found cotton gauze bandage inside

her abdomen during an ultrasound scan, Rashidul said.

Doctors removed those objects after performing another surgery around 3:30pm on Sunday, but the patient died hours later around 7:30pm.

Swapan, a surgeon at Rangpur medical, said the objects caused infection in the patient's abdomen and the infection caused internal bleeding.

Contacted, manager of Rose Hospital Mobarak Hossain Milon denied any negligence on the part of their hospital.

The woman died as she didn't have proper care at home, the manager said.

He refused to provide the names of the doctors who were involved in the faulty surgery.

The hospital shut its operation on Sunday evening after the news of Nasima's death spread.

Civil Surgeon in Rangpur Hiranmay Barman told The Daily Star that they would investigate the incident.

Rashidul told the correspondent that the authorities of Rose Hospital were responsible for her wife's death.

But, he said he would not file a case in this regard as he was unwilling to bear the expenses for running a case.

Bangladeshi killed

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Those killed in the district of Wadi Rabea, about 21 km (13 miles) from the city centre, included two Libyans and five foreigners from Bangladesh and sub-Saharan African countries, said Usama Ali, a spokesman for the ambulance and emergency authority in Tripoli, Reuters reported.

Pictures posted by the authority showed several wounded people, in bloodstained civilian clothes, lying on beds in ambulances or medical facilities.

According to Reuters, Tripoli has been under attack since early April from forces loyal to east Libya-based commander Khalifa Haftar. The offensive by his Libyan National Army (LNA) quickly stalled, and both sides, drawing on foreign support, have used drones and fighter jets to carry out air strikes

amid sporadic fighting.

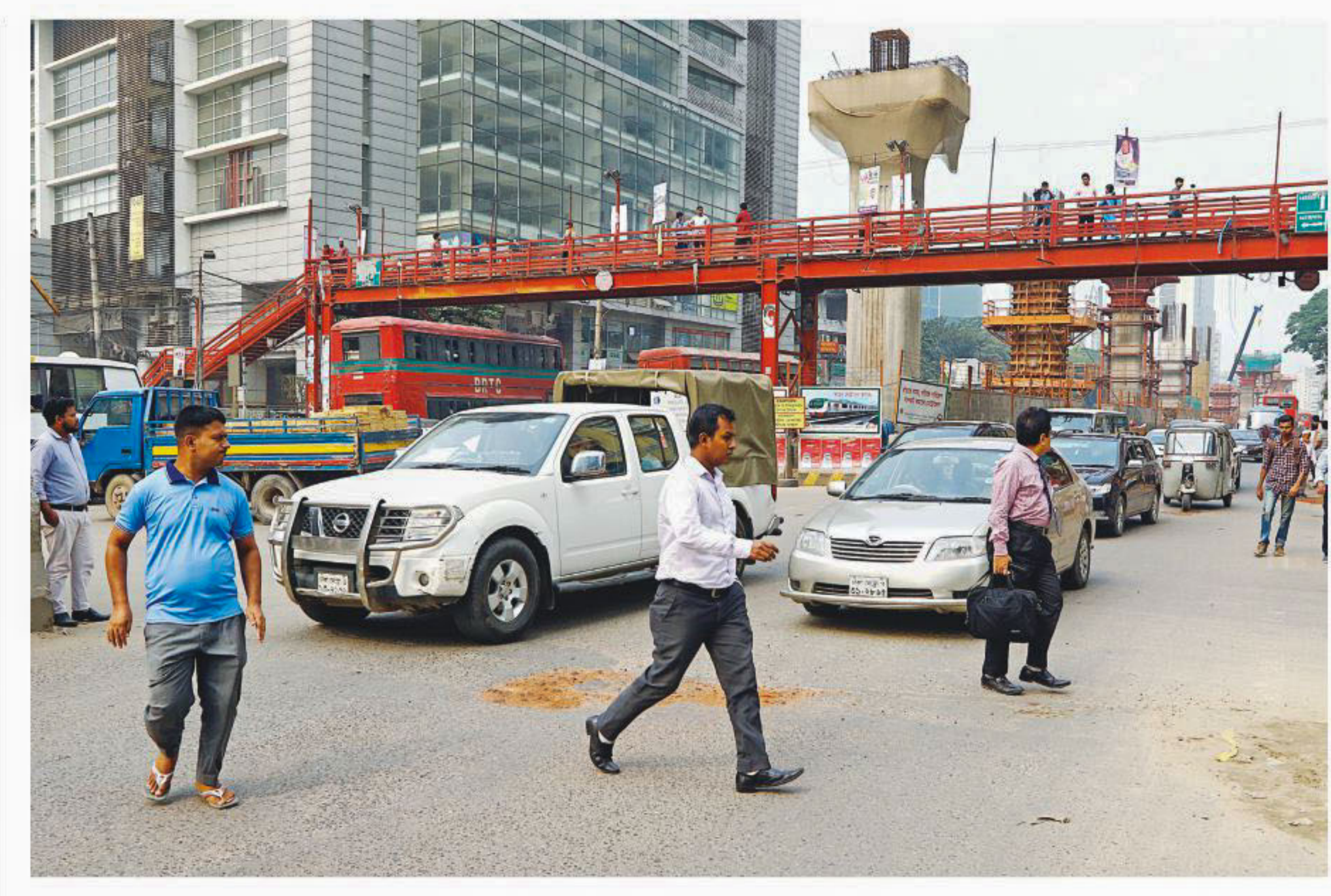
LNA air strikes have repeatedly hit civilian areas in Tripoli. Officials in eastern Libya contacted by Reuters on Monday said they had no information about an air strike by their forces.

Since 2014, Libya has been split between rival political and military groupings based in Tripoli and the east, the news organisation said.

Haftar has received backing from the United Arab Emirates, Egypt and Russia, as well as fluctuating support from some Western powers.

Last week the United States called on the LNA to halt its offensive on Tripoli, warning against Russian interference.

The conflict in and around Tripoli has killed and wounded hundreds of civilians and displaced more than 120,000.



Jaywalkers cross the busy Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue in the capital's Banglamotor area yesterday, putting their lives at risk. The new Road Transport Act, 2018, came into effect on Sunday, but such violations of the traffic rules are still rampant in the city.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Transport strike on, defying call from minister

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transport sector. On paper, the new law came into effect on November 1, but it was enforced Sunday.

Transport workers went for the strike in Jashore on Sunday, hours after Quader said the law would come into effect on the day. They enforced a similar programme in Bogura and Kushtia on Friday and Saturday.

Asked whether the government was facing any pressure not to enforce the law, Quader yesterday said, "We have to enforce the law ignoring the pressure we face, because the act was passed by parliament."

At a press conference on contemporary issues at his secretariat office, Quader, also Awami League general secretary, urged transport owners and workers to refrain from calling the strike centring the new transport law for the sake of road safety and their own interest.

He added that the authorities concerned had been given necessary directives so that no one does excess while enforcing the new law.

However, many inter-district bus services remained suspended in the nine districts following the strike, causing sufferings of people.

When Quader's attention was drawn to the new development at the press

conference, he said he was aware of it.

"Our secretary [of the ministry] has already talked to them [transport leaders] and I also talked to them. Let's see what happens," he said.

In Kushtia, transport workers called an indefinite strike, halting inter-district bus services, except Dhaka.

The decision was made at a meeting on Thursday, our correspondent reports, quoting Mahbulul Haq, president of Kushtia District Motor Workers Union.

The routes where no bus is plying are Kushtia-Rajbari, Kushtia-Khulna, Kushtia-Meherpur, Kushtia-Chuadanga, and Kushtia-Pabna.

Seventy percent bus drivers and helpers do not have required documents, said Mahbulul.

SM Tanvir Arafath, superintendent of Kushtia police, said the law enforcers were ready to take steps as per the government directives to enforce the new transport act.

In Khulna, road communications with other districts were suspended as the transport workers kept their vehicles off the roads, reports our correspondent there.

Transport leaders demanded amendments to some sections of the law. All offences under the law should be made "bailable", they said.

The workers will continue the strike

until the amendments are made, said Khulna Motor Workers Union President Nurul Islam Baby.

In Rajshahi, bus service inside the district and with Naogaon was halted.

Jahangir Alam, president of Transport Workers Union in Rajshahi, said some workers were observing the transport strike, but no official decision was made in this regard.

Our district correspondents reported similar situation in Satkhira, Jhenidah, Narail, Meherpur, Jashore, and Bhupuar upazila of Tangail.

Rabiul Hossain Rabi, president of Khulna divisional regional committee of Bangladesh Road Transport Workers Federation, said they did not make any decision about the strike.

"Our central committee will decide the next course of action regarding the law in its meetings on November 21 and 22," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Khondaker Enayet Ullah, secretary general of Bangladesh Road Transport Owners Association, said transport owners wanted to operate vehicles, but many workers did not want to do so.

"We want to assist the government in enforcing the law, but requested the authorities to enforce it gradually and they accepted our request," he claimed.

Mobile courts go soft on first day

FROM PAGE 1

Manik Mia Avenue told this correspondent that they knew about the steep increase in fines, but their employers encouraged them to drive even though they didn't have proper documents.

Many drivers were fined for driving medium or heavy vehicles with licences issued for light vehicles.

BRIA Executive Magistrate Masud Hasan Patwary said one could upgrade their light vehicle drivers' licence one year after its issuance.

A bus owner present at the scene alleged that getting a licence from BRIA was not easy.

"They [officials] demand Tk 10,000, half of which is bribe, for a licence. How would a driver pay this?" the bus owner asked.

He then demanded a fair licencing process.

Another bus owner alleged that the mobile court was turning a blind eye to the offences of buses of the state-run Bangladesh Road Transport Corporation.

This correspondent also saw a BRITC bus driving on Manik Mia Avenue with its doors open, and picking up and dropping off passengers on the road-both punishable offences under the new act.

The BRIA officials refuted both the allegations.

BRIA director Masudur said the courts didn't sentence anyone to prison as officials would fully enforce the law gradually.

Another Executive Magistrate Sarah Sadia Taznin said her court had fined

10 offenders Tk 13,500 on Manik Mia Avenue.

"I imposed a maximum of Tk 5,000 and a minimum Tk 500. As per the new law, the fine would have been greater," she said.

BRIA Executive Magistrate SM Samirul Islam said they had not started fining any jaywalkers yet.

The BRIA director claimed that situation on Dhaka streets have already started changing for the better because of the stricter law.

Although the volume of traffic was moderate for a weekday, the usual chaotic driving and jaywalking were noticeable.

At busy intersections, the traffic division of Dhaka Metropolitan Police put up banners mentioning the offences and punishment for violations.

Rice gets pricier

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In Dinajpur, a major rice growing district, the price of a sack of rice (50 kg) rose by Tk 300.

Rice prices started rising when farmers are harvesting the second biggest paddy crop, Aman. Last year, they produced 1.40 crore tonnes of the crop.

The biggest harvest is Boro and it fetched 1.94 crore tonnes of paddy this year.

These two crops account for 93 percent of the total annual rice output, 3.60 crore tonnes in fiscal year 2018-19, according to preliminary estimate of Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

The remaining seven percent is met by scattered Aus crop.

Amid a production excess, rice and paddy prices started falling since October last year and they were low until last month. Farmers had been protesting for not getting fair price, and millers had been pleading for export incentives so that they could clear the surplus.

"Given the production of the last two seasons, and consumption requirement, there is supposed to be a surplus. So, it is not clear why the price has increased," said Quazi Shahabuddin, former director general of Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies.

Hopefully, this hike will not last once Aman harvest begins in full swing, he said.

There should be around 30 lakh tonnes of surplus rice, said an official of the agriculture ministry.

Azizul Islam, a farmers' leader in Dinajpur, said farmers do not have any Boro paddy. All the paddy over the last month and a half have gone to large millers, he said.

Abdul Matin, owner of Titas Rice Agency at Mohammadpur Krishi market, a wholesale depot of rice in the capital, said, "This is not fully clear to us why millers are increasing prices. But there are speculations that stock of premium- and medium-quality grains,

especially those grown once a year, are not that good.

"That is why, it appears that millers think they would be able to sell slowly. They are trying to make a quick buck."

Millers, however, said prices of premium varieties, including Miniket and BR-28, increased as stocks were declining due to increased consumption.

Nirod Boron Saha, president of the Naogaon Dhan O Chal Aratdar Babshayee Samity, (a rice, paddy traders' body), said, "As the prices of rice had been low for several months, people consumed finer grains more. This has created a shortage in the market. That is why those who have stocks are now selling slowly."

He said that in Naogaon, Miniket price increased to Tk 2,250 per sack from Tk 1,800 of three weeks ago. Prices of other varieties have not increased that much in our area, he said.

KM Layek Ali, general secretary of the Bangladesh Auto Major and Husking Mills Association, said, "Prices of paddy have increased after the government declared it was buying more grain [6 lakh tonnes of paddy] from the farmers."

Responding to a question, he said the demand for paddy also increased as there has been some moves made for exporting the grain.

The commerce ministry has so far approved export of around one lakh tonnes of rice. The ministry is yet to decide on permitting export of another 1 lakh tonnes, said a senior official. It plans to allow shipment of 2 lakh tonnes in total.

The news of rice being exported has an impact on the local market, said Reza Humayun Kabir Chowdhury Shamim, president of Dinajour Auto Rice Mills Association.

Saidul Islam, a retailer at Kushtia municipal market, shared his experience of visiting the country's largest rice hub in Khajaganar on Thursday. Khajaganar has 290 rice mills.

HOUSE CONSTRUCTION

Rajuk fines Shakib Khan Tk 10 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Film actor Shakib Khan was fined Tk 10 lakh for constructing his house in the capital's Niketon area violating the Rajuk-approved design.



A mobile court of the Rajdhani Unnayan Kartripakkha (Rajuk), led by Magistrate Ashraf Hosen, imposed the fine during a drive yesterday.

Mohammad Hossain, authorised officer of Rajuk (zone 4), told The Daily Star that the court found inconsistency in the documents shown by Shakib's brother-in-law and caretaker of the house.

The roof of the building was built in violation of the Rajuk-approved design, he said.

Contacted over phone, Shakib, who is now abroad, told The Daily Star, "I am astonished and shocked. Why have they done this? I didn't make the design. The engineers have done this."

He, however, said, "I respect the law. It should be equal for all."

Russia has handed ships back to Ukraine ahead of summit

AFP, Moscow

Russia said yesterday it had handed over three navy ships it seized a year ago from Ukraine, in the latest move to ease tensions between the two countries ahead of a crucial summit.

After an exchange of prisoners in September and the withdrawal of some frontline forces over the last few weeks, the handover marked another step in trying to resolve the five-year conflict in eastern Ukraine.

Efforts have been building since the election this year of Volodymyr Zelensky as Ukraine's new president, and on Friday France announced he would hold his first face-to-face talks with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Paris on December 9.

The talks, which will also include French President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Angela Merkel, will be the highest-level negotiations on the conflict since 2016.

Russia's foreign ministry said yesterday that the ships -- two gunboats and a tugboat -- had been handed over to Ukraine.

It said they had "illegally crossed the Russian border" and been held as evidence but were no longer needed.

There was no immediate confirmation of the handover from Kiev.

The Ukrainian ships were seized in November last year in the most serious confrontation between the two countries since the start of the conflict in 2014.

Russian forces boarded and took control of the vessels as they headed through the Kerch Strait, a narrow waterway giving access to the Sea of Azov that is used by Ukraine and Russia.

They captured 24 Ukrainian sailors, who were returned to Ukraine as part of the September prisoner swap. Border officials had said on Sunday that the ships would be returned and local television showed footage of them being towed by the Russian coastguard through the Kerch Strait.

Govt to move

FROM PAGE 1

Action would be taken against them, the secretary said.

"On behalf of the government, I want to assure people that the prices of onions will come down soon," he said.

Cargo planes carrying onions from abroad will hopefully reach the country on Tuesday, said Zafar.

"A huge amount of onion is also being imported through sea route," he said.

Initiatives have been taken to import onions from Egypt, Turkey, and China via air cargo following the directives from the prime minister, he added.

In Chattogram, wholesale price of onions imported from Myanmar came down to Tk140-150 per kg at Khatunganj kitchen market.

The same variety was sold for Tk190-200 per kg a day before.

Retailers in the kitchen markets, however, still found to be charging Tk 200-230 per kg.

Abdur Rashid, a wholesaler at Karwanabazar kitchen market, told The Daily Star that there was no mechanism for controlling the onion price and that the traders were selling the bulbs at a price fixed by them.

Prices dropped as the number of customers reduced significantly in the last two days, the trader said.

Onion prices began to rise across the country about two months ago when the Indian government imposed a ban on onion export.

But the prices started to rise sharply in the last week.