

Realtor arrested

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 declaring those as poultry feed machinery.
 The import was done through three firms -- M/S Agro BD & JP, M/S Henan, Anhui Agro LC and Hebra Banco.
 These were opened using falsified documents and fake addresses.
 The arrest comes after customs detectives last month filed 25 cases with Paltan police station against the three firms on allegations of laundering Tk 431 crore, Tk 439 crore and Tk 290 crore.
 Titu and Kabir were accused in 15 of those cases, said CIID in a press release yesterday.
 Customs House Chattogram also filed a case against Kabir Hossain in August this year, alleging his involvement in laundering Tk 8.36 crore.
 In a press briefing yesterday afternoon, CIID Director General Shahidul Islam said the anomalies surfaced after customs detected 12 import containers with high-duty items, which were brought using fake documents and addresses.

Later, it was found that 121 containers were brought illegally. Shahidul said they also had information on more such containers which were brought through unlawful means.
 "We are probing it and we hope to get more information if we interrogate the accused. This is an organised group who have been importing valuable items for a long time through false declaration and duty evasion", he said.
 Shahidul said Titu was the "mastermind" behind the operation and Kabir helped him prepare the false documents.
 "We are trying to arrest other accused," he said.
 Customs detectives earlier unearthed a scheme by the syndicate, where they would import consumer goods in the name of capital machinery which have only one percent import tariff, much lower than the import duty on consumer goods.
 The goods were allegedly imported from China, according to the CIID.

Shahidul added that the CIID had so far filed 78 cases related to laundering of Tk 3,200 crore.
 Of the cases, the Criminal Investigation Department had been requested to probe 21, including the one related to the release of 22 consignments by illegally using IDs and passwords of two revenue officials to log into the Automated System for Customs Data World, an integrated customs management system.
 The CIID is inquiring into the remaining cases.
 The Daily Star called the offices of Mirror Development Ltd, but the number was found to be vacant.

Rab man

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 went to the spot, we frisked him and raided his house, where he has been living with his family for many years.
 We detained him with 800 yaba pills yesterday around 4:30pm.
 "Shahinur Rahman has been working as a Rab person for RAB-6 in Khulna," Obaidul said.
 Azim Uddin, officer-in-charge of the Shahjahanpur police station, said, "Shahinur Rahman is a corporal [army person] and [has been] working for the Rab-6. Therefore, we handed him over to the Bogura cantonment yesterday evening [in this regard]. We have not filed any case against him as he is from the army."
 When contacted Lt Col Syed Mohammad Nurul Saleheen Yusuf, commanding officer of Khulna Rab-6, said, "Shahinur is our member [corporal]. He was on casual leave for eight days from last November 25. He did something wrong in Bogura, therefore police held him and handed over to the Bogura cantonment. You will get the rest of the information from the Bogura cantonment."

BJP chief

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 made attempts to thwart the hearing of the case in the Supreme Court.
 "Congress leaders would tell the Supreme Court that there is no need for hearing the Ram Janmabhoomi case. With your backing, we submitted that it be taken forward, and the result is that the apex court has ruled that only a Ram temple will be built in Ayodhya," he said.

Registration

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 against its name before being launched, he added.
 Several meetings were held with the home, telecom and ICT ministries, and later the home ministry was requested to complete the investigation as soon as possible so that the registration process could be started soon, Hasan said.
 Steps will be taken against unauthorised online news portals after the registration process is completed, he said.



Dhaka Metro Rail construction workers yesterday spray water on roads in the capital's Karwan Bazar area around the metro rail construction site to free those of dust. The Department of Environment late last month fined the contractors for contributing to air pollution.
 PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

Bye bye brick!

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 Environment (DoE).
 Sources from the DoE and Housing and Building Research Institute (HBRI) said around 2,500 crore pieces of bricks are produced every year, from which around 45 percent is used by the government in different development projects.
 Experts said the country is gradually phasing out clay bricks and embracing cost-effective and eco-friendly blocks.
 The concept of environment-friendly buildings, or popularly known as "green buildings", is catching on in Bangladesh. While the green building movement has been around globally since the 1970s, it has picked up momentum in Bangladesh only in the last couple of years as some big companies have started producing and using blocks.
 Inspired by the ensuing demand and an urge to protect the environment, businesses of eco-friendly building materials have also increased in the

past couple of years.
 Researchers in Bangladesh have started conceptualising and developing new bricks to mitigate the environmental damage caused by brick manufacturing.
 Mohammad Shamim Akhter, director general of HBRI, said that making bricks requires excavating around 60 million tonnes of topsoil, causing dust pollution and degradation of the ground. He said that they have already developed a range of alternative, environmentally-friendly building materials for walls, floors, roofing and road construction, adding that the new materials will reduce environmental pollution and cut construction costs significantly.
 Akhter said the price of construction of concrete blocks will be between Tk 4 to Tk 9.
 The products include bricks made of a compressed composite material consisting of river sand, cement and additional mixtures. River sand is a

waste product in Bangladesh and the rivers require dredging on a regular basis.
 HBRI officials said around 150-160 block preparing factories have already been established in Bangladesh since 1998 but they said there was a crisis of demand.
 The new bricks are also lighter than the traditional ones, making them easier and cheaper to transport.
 TM Shohabul Haque, quality control engineer of Master Group which produces blocks, said they are yet to get expected orders from the market as people, except city corporations, are still not using blocks.
 "The government should come forward strictly to save the environment and also to save the agricultural land. The strength of blocks is stronger than traditional bricks as it is made of cement and sand," he said.
 He also said the cost of each block would be Tk 38 which is equivalent to 4.5 bricks.

Picking up where Baker left off

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 in one of the tin-roofed mud huts near the centre.
 In his lifetime, Dr Baker trained a number of local men and women as paramedics, who still frequent neighbouring villages to give treatment to the sick, especially pregnant women and newborns.
 "The local doctors and the paramedics treat the patients, both in patient and outdoor, and we just assist them in their works," Jason told The Daily Star. They will also be performing as international correspondents to collect foreign donations.
 Those in need of critical treatment are admitted at the 40-bed indoor centre that has different units for diabetes, TB, diarrhoea, burn and mother and child.
 Dr Baker, who was given Bangladeshi citizenship in 2014 and lovingly referred to as "Daktar Bhai", used to collect funds to run the centre from private donors including his friends and well-wishers in New Zealand, the US and the UK.
 "Daktar Bhai has left us, but his health care centre remains as a blessing," said Shilpy Hagidok of Kailakuri village.
 Since his death, two intern doctors from Gonoshasthya Kendra, took care of the centre by rotation. They were

assisted by all previous paramedics. Later, Dr Rakibul Hasan Rakib from Gonoshasthya Kendra joined as a medical officer in 2017.
 Jason first met Dr Baker when he was a student at the University of Wisconsin Medical School at his then clinic at Thanarbaid village in Madhupur in 1999. The two were introduced by Fr Doglus Venne, who was Jason's uncle and a friend of Dr Baker.
 Since then he travelled several times to Bangladesh, and twice accompanied by his wife, to visit the health care centre.
 Dr Merindy, who studied at the Health Sciences Centre College of University of Oklahoma, met Jason while they were working at Netividad Medical Centre in California in 2003. They married in 2005.
 The couple moved to Bangladesh in 2018 and learned the Bangla language, while they were living in Mymensingh town for about a year.
 On why they choose to live in a remote rural area, Jason said, "We came here as we want to serve the poor. And we are very happy here. The locals are very good people and they are our friends."
 Dr Merindy told The Daily Star that she was impressed seeing Dr Baker's initiative during her previous two visits to Bangladesh. "I am happy to

be a part of this project."
 "However, as our two-year visa will expire in 2020, we will move back to the US for a short time. But we will return again to continue work on this project for several years."
 The couple has enrolled their children in a local missionary school as well.
 Tanjina Afrin Jui, an intern from Gonoshasthya Kendra who works at the centre, said, "Dr Jason and Dr Merindy are sincere people who help us treat the patients. I have never seen them unhappy over anything here."
 The Kailakuri Health Care Project at Madhupur was turned to Dr Baker's Organisation for Well-being after obtaining registration under the Social Welfare Department last year. It was also registered under the NGO Bureau of Bangladesh two months ago.
 Pijon Nongmin, a local indigenous youth and executive director of the organisation, told The Daily Star that after the death of Dr Baker, the health care centre was running like before with support from the government, private organisations, and individuals.
 The centre has a workforce of 80 and 30 of them were paramedics.
 However, donations from foreign countries, including New Zealand, have reduced since his death, he added.

Recruiting agencies

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 At the meeting, Bangladesh expressed its concerns regarding migrant workers' safety, especially of the female workers, he said.
 "They [Saudi authorities] also expressed desire and due sincerity to work together to resolve the problem," he added.
 Saudi authorities have stressed for joint initiative to stop "visa trading" in both countries, he said.
 As per a decision of the meeting, police will not handover "runaway" female migrant workers to their sponsors, said Joint Secretary Zahid Hossain, of the ministry concerned, reading out a statement.
 To ensure safety for female migrant workers, their information will be incorporated in an IT-based platform known as "Musaned", he said.
 The information will include female workers' detailed addresses, dates of their arrivals and appointments with sponsors, exit information of returnee female workers, and full addresses of recruiting agencies and sponsors, Zahid said.
 He added that if serious allegations over female worker's safety is raised, the Saudi Department of Protection and Support will take prompt action.
 Related labour welfare wing will also notify authorities concerned about the matter, he further said.
 Zahid also said that the issue regarding signing an "agreement" between the two countries over recruiting Bangladeshi workers has also been discussed.
 However, Saudi authorities informed that such an issue was still under "examination" and that they would discuss it further in the next

JIT meeting, he added.
 Secretary Salim Reza said 146 female migrant workers who wanted to return home from the Gulf country had been staying at a safe home governed by Bangladesh authorities there.
 Some of them alleged they faced abuse and torture by their kafil (sponsor). Some others alleged that they were not provided with enough food, he said, responding to a query.
 Besides, 34 more female workers were awaiting deportation, he added.
 About 2.93 lakh female migrant workers have been sent to Saudi Arabia since 2015. So far, 8,507 of them have returned to Bangladesh.
 If abused and tortured female migrant workers want to stay in Saudi Arabia to continue the legal battle against their abusive employers, the ministry will provide them with the required support and protection, including their stay at safe home, the secretary further said.
 Meanwhile, ruling Awami League lawmaker Israfil Alam yesterday urged the ministry concerned to arrange adequate "shelter homes" for female migrant workers in Saudi Arabia so that they can stay there at night after working at the houses of their employers during the day.
 "Arrange shelters for them even if it needs rented space," Israfil, also chairman of Bangladesh National Parliamentarians' Caucus on Migration and Development, said at a discussion organised by Bomsa, an organisation working for female migrant workers' welfare, at Cirdap.
 Massive reform is required to end the torture and abuse of female migrant workers, he added.

Full stop

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 "One is that at 96 I am cutting back on my commitments and the second is that fewer organisations and individuals are now caring about the correct use of the apostrophe in the English language," he wrote on the society's website.
 "We, and our many supporters

worldwide, have done our best but the ignorance and laziness present in modern times have won!"
 The www.apostrophe.org.uk website will remain open for reference.
 It gives a simple guide to readers, with examples of how apostrophes are used to denote missing letters and possession but never plurals.

57pc would prefer

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 Zulfiqar Ali, a member of the team.
 He made a presentation on the study on the closing day of a two-day seminar in the capital yesterday. The BIDS organised the programme on the findings of a number of research works.
 According to the study, the top five problems identified by city dwellers are traffic jam, air pollution, lack of safe drinking water, bad road condition and waterlogging.
 A total of 3,100 households (12,000 people), randomly chosen from 31 wards of Dhaka north and south city corporation areas, took part in the study. Over 95 percent of them said traffic jam is the most serious problem in the city.
 Air pollution was identified as the second most serious problem by 66 percent respondents to the study, followed by lack of pure drinking water by 61 percent, bad road condition by 48 percent and waterlogging by 45 percent respondents.
 They also pointed out four other major problems -- eve teasing, lack of safety, electricity and continuous gas supply.
 "That apart, there is an extremely wide income inequality among the city's residents," said Zulfiqar.
 Of the total income generated in

the capital each month, the bottom 10 percent of the dwellers earns merely one percent, bottom 50 percent earns 18 percent while the top 10 percent earns 41 percent, he said.
 Zulfiqar mentioned that over 72 percent of the city's residents live in rented houses and 40 percent of the dwellers have salaried jobs.
 With achieving education remaining a subject to affordability and parental background, one-third of the city dwellers are still illiterate, found the study.
 It also identified that the per capita monthly medical expenditure in the city was Tk 7,417, in addition to an income loss of Tk 4,300 due to various acute and chronic diseases.
 Syed Abdul Hamid, a professor of health economics at Dhaka University, said the issue of depression and mental health was fast emerging as a major threat to the society and this was time for paying serious attention to it.
 Presenting the findings of another BIDS study titled "What makes you a Smart User of Smartphone," Mohammad Golam Nabi Mozumder said use of smartphones by young children might also be productive if they were properly guided and dealt with by parents.
 Noted urban researcher Prof Nazrul Islam chaired the session.

Dhaka Wasa MD apologises to High Court

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 On May 4, 2010, rights body, Human Rights and Peace for Bangladesh, filed the petition, seeking immediate steps to prevent water pollution in the Buriganga.
 Meanwhile, Dhaka Wasa Managing Director Taqsem A Khan yesterday unconditionally apologised to the HC bench for making an untrue statement about sewerage lines connected to the Buriganga.
 He apologised to the court through lawyer M Nahiyah-Ibn-Subhan saying that there were 16 sewerage lines connected to the river, which were polluting the river.
 Nahiyah also represented Wasa lawyer AM Masum before the HC. He said Masum could not appear before the court due to personal issues.
 The court refused to hear

arguments from Nahiyah in details and said that he had no authority to place arguments instead of the Wasa lawyer.
 Writ petitioner's lawyer Manzill Murshid told the court that the Dhaka Wasa could have sealed off the sources of waste connected to the Buriganga as a part of implementation of the court's 2011 directives, but it did not do so.
 He prayed to the HC bench to issue a contempt of court rule against the Dhaka Wasa MD for not complying with the directives.
 Earlier in the day, the Department of Environment (DoE) submitted a report before the HC through its lawyer Amatul Karim, stating that it shut down 18 factories on Buriganga in Dhaka as they were operating without environment clearance

certificates.
 The HC bench fixed today for passing orders on the issue.
 It also asked Dhaka Wasa law officer Zahidul Islam to appear before the court today along with documents of his activities regarding the 2011 directives.
 Zahidul appeared before the bench to represent the Dhaka Wasa MD during the court proceedings.
 Following the writ petition, the HC on June 1, 2011, directed the government to seal off all sewerage lines to the Buriganga within the next year.
 The court had also ordered the authorities to stop dumping waste into the river and declared their inaction in preventing water pollution illegal. The authorities had been directed to clean up the river

and move all sources of pollution from there.
 On November 17 this year, the HC ordered the DoE to shut down the factories on the Buriganga which were operating without environment clearance certificates.
 At the same time, the court asked the Dhaka Wasa MD to explain within 15 days as to why legal action should not be taken against him for making a false statement about sewerage lines connected to the river.
 The Dhaka Wasa MD earlier submitted a report, saying there were no sewerage lines connected to the Buriganga and there was no pollution. But BIWTA in a report said there were several sewerage lines connected to the river, which were polluting the river.

Former head of Xinjiang jailed for life over graft

AFP, Beijing
 One of China's highest-ranking Uighur officials and the former head of the troubled northwest Xinjiang region was sentenced to life in prison over graft charges yesterday, a court said.
 It is among the most high-profile cases in President Xi Jinping's sweeping campaign against corruption in the ruling Communist Party, which critics have compared to a political purge.
 Nur Bekri, an ethnic Uighur who was most recently head of China's national energy administration, pleaded guilty to accepting over 79 million yuan (\$11.2 million) worth of bribes over the course of twenty years, according to the Shenyang Intermediate People's Court in northeast China.
 Investigators claimed he had used his position to live "extravagantly" and benefit himself and his family, buying luxury cars and doling out favours to others.
 In the courtroom, Bekri said he would "obey the verdict and not appeal," said the Shenyang court on its official Twitter-like Weibo account.
 In addition to life imprisonment, Bekri was "deprived of political rights for life" and all his personal assets were confiscated.

New strategy of old JMB

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 new strategies of mainstream JMB and also got some online identities after interrogating the arrestees," Rahmatullah Chowdhury, additional deputy commissioner of CITC, told The Daily Star yesterday.
 He also said they were verifying the activities of those identities.
 Raihan joined the outfit in 2010 and he started working for JMB from

2011 after meeting then top leader Dr Nazrul.
 During interrogation, Raihan said that the mainstream JMB faced a crisis after a large number of its leaders joined the "Neo-JMB" in late 2015, said a high official of the CITC.
 In the meantime, Dr Nazrul was killed by his fellow militants and other top leaders of JMB were killed by the law enforcers, said CITC officials.

Amid such a situation, Raihan was given charge of the outfit in 2017 and instructed to increase members by organising different welfare activities in the Rohingya camps in Cox's Bazar, a CITC official said, requesting anonymity.
 The outfit had been able to establish a stronghold in several northern districts, including Dinajpur, Thakurgaon,

Nilphamari, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur, Gaibandha, Bogura, Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj, said the official.
 "But several JMB leaders got arrested in 2017 and 2018 when they tried to invite people with religious books and papers," the official said, quoting Raihan as saying.
 Later, the militants started recruiting members using online platforms, the official said.