



'NOTHING HAS CHANGED'
Iran FM Javad Zarif
reiterates demand for lifting US
sanctions before
nuclear talks
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DIGITAL SECURITY ACT

Misused to muzzle dissent

457 people including 75 journos prosecuted, held under DSA last year, says Article 19

ZYMA ISLAM and ASHUTOSH SARKAR

Incarcerated for over nine months, writer Mushtaq Ahmed and cartoonist Ahmed Kishore were brought into the courtroom 11 days ago and produced before a judge.

Nobody knew they would suddenly be brought to court -- not even their families, who have not seen them face-to-face since their arrests, because of Covid-19 regulations about visitors at the country's prisons.

Their families say this was their first trip out of prison, since they were both produced before a courthouse last year on May 6 and arrested under the Digital Security Act (DSA).

This newspaper's court reporter, present in the courtroom, described them as looking gaunt and haggard, their clothes

hanging loose off their frames, as they were, however, not in handcuffs like many of the other prisoners.

"When I last talked to Kishore a month back, he told me his eyesight is failing," said Kishore's brother Ahmed Kabir.

The media and well-wishers rejoiced when photojournalist Shafiqul Islam Kajol was released on bail last year, but he is just one name among hundreds, including journalists, charged under the Digital Security Act.

Eleven days ago, as Judge Ash Sams Joglul Hossain of Dhaka Cyber Tribunal acknowledged the two prisoners -- the writer and the cartoonist -- in the docket, he also directed the investigators to launch a "further probe" into the case, and submit a report by March 23.

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PHOTO: COLLECTED

Firefighters and locals dousing a fire that broke out in Cumilla Potti area in the capital's Maniknagar yesterday. The fire broke out in a tin-built house around 3:20pm and firefighters doused the flames around 6:15pm. Fire service officials said more than 200 rooms were burnt down. The cause of the fire is being investigated.

Where did the money go?

People's Leasing and some BB officials trade blame over Tk 6.5cr spent to cover up scam

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The chairman of a non-banking financial institution, central bank officials, and an audit firm are giving different statements about a scam involving Tk 6.5 crore.

Uzzal Kumar Nandi, chairman of People's Leasing and Financial Services (PLFS), told a magistrate last week that certain Bangladesh Bank officials took the money in bribes between 2009 and 2015.

"To bury [other] misdeeds in the PLFS, a deputy governor, a general manager, and others of the central bank were given about Tk 6.5 crore between 2009 and 2015," he said.

But chartered accountancy firm HodaVasi Chowdhury & Co said it found in an audit that the money was taken illegally by members of the PLFS board of directors.

PLFS hired HodaVasi in November 2015 for the audit. The latter submitted the report the following year.

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2 students sexually harassed

Suspects videotaped them, extorted money

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Noakhali

Two college students -- a girl and a boy -- were sexually harassed by youths who forced them into a compromising situation and videotaped them in Noakhali Sadar upazila on Thursday night.

They then extorted Tk 10,000 from the victims by threatening to release the video on social media.

The female victim later filed a case against the suspects, who could not be arrested as of yesterday evening.

The victims are graduation-level students at a local college.

According to the case statement, the girl went to her male classmate's house in a

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OXFORD-ASTRAZENECA VACCINE

Protection expected 3 weeks after first jab

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN

The Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine's first shot starts its effect three weeks after it is administered and remains effective up to three months, according to a latest study.

Experts said there might be misconception among some people that Covid-19 vaccines provide immediate protection.

They also said that there was also no evidence that any of the current Covid-19

vaccines could completely stop people from being infected, advising people to continue to wear masks and maintain other health guidelines laid out by the World Health Organization.

Bangladesh has been administering the Oxford vaccine across the country among people aged 40 years and above. So far, around 21 lakh people have received their first dose.

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'We're working to ensure no language gets extinct'

Says PM

Bss, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government has been working to ensure that no language across the world faces extinction.

"We have established the International Mother Language Institute so that other languages in the world can be preserved. We have taken the measure to make sure that no language faces extinction and their existence can come out," she said.

The prime minister said this while opening the four-day programmes marking the Shaheed Dibash and the International Mother Language Day, 2021 and distributing the International Mother Language Day Award, 2021, at the International Mother Language Institute (IMLI), joining virtually from her official residence the Gono Bhaban in the capital.

Mentioning that a language museum has been established in the IMLI, she said that the samples of

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PHOTO: KONGKON KARMAKER

A man in a torn T-shirt and with bruises on his arm tied to an electrical post in Goneshtola area of Dinajpur town. Seeing the man with two rods, locals thought he was a thief. They tied him up and assaulted him. He was in this state for around four hours before police rescued him. The photo was taken yesterday morning.

BUSINESS

Youngone splurging in man-made fibre

Youngone Corporation, a Korea-based global conglomerate, has made massive investments in Bangladesh for producing man-made fibre (MMF) for clothing as artificial materials are now dominating the fashion industry, according to Kihak Sung, its chairman and chief executive officer. Famous for its outerwear and MMF products, Youngone recently started manufacturing polyester fabrics at three factories in the Korean Export Processing Zone in Chattogram. Youngone has already invested around \$600 million in Bangladesh and plans to invest another \$1 billion over the next few years depending on the country's situation, according to Sung.

STORY ON B4

Teens hawk drugs in Karwan Bazar

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Around 7:00pm on February 14, a group of five or six young girls aged between 14 and 18 were seen roaming around in front of Tejgaon level crossing.

Wearing worn clothes and torn sandals, they went close to rickshaw-pullers and microbuses standing near the level crossing gate and asking in low voices: "Hey, how many? How many?"

When a passerby or passenger waved at the girls, three or four rushed towards them, racing each other to reach first.

The girl who won the short race was seen bringing out something wrapped in a small, white piece of paper. The transaction happened in a matter of seconds -- the girl handed the small paper package to the passerby in exchange for money and went back to the spot she was occupying before her business venture.

The customer also disappeared from the spot.

After observing closely and talking to some passersby and rickshaw-

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