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“The plan to establish a five star hotel on the ancestral land of the Mro people is a sin and crime as well. We can't make such imprudent plan, just because we have money.”

BIPF GENERAL SECRETARY SANJEEB DRONG



“At this level of cases with variants spreading, we stand to completely lose the hard-earned ground we have gained.”

CDC CHIEF ROCHELLE WALENSKY WARNS OF SURGE IN COVID CASES



“Cutting aid is a death sentence.”

UN CHIEF ANTONIO GUTERRES DISAPPOINTED AT OUTCOME OF PLEDGING EVENT FOR YEMEN

TEST RELIEF, FOOD FOR WORK

It's now cash for work

Depleting stock of food grains forces the govt to opt for cash over wheat or rice

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and WASIM BIN HABIB

In the wake of depleting food stock and sluggish public procurement of foodgrains, the government has started providing cash instead of rice and wheat to implement its Test Relief and Food for Work programmes.

Those who carry out tasks such as repair of roads, drains and culverts under the schemes will get cash till the end of the current fiscal year, food ministry officials told this newspaper yesterday.

Every year, the government takes up rural infrastructure development schemes meant for creating temporary employment opportunities for the poor.

It allocates three to four lakh tonnes of rice and wheat for paying the workers under the programmes. In this year's budget, Tk 1,600 crore has been allocated for the purpose, said the ministry officials.

The change in payment method follows the government's failure to replenish food reserve and achieve its procurement target

FOOD STOCK (in tonne)

6.47 lakh FEB, 2021

11.88 lakh JULY, 2020

16.74 lakh JULY, 2019

of rice and paddy during the last Boro harvest and this Aman season.

The country's food reserve dwindled to 6.47 lakh tonnes last month. In July last year, the government had a rice stock of 11.88 lakh tonnes.

During the same period in 2019, the food department had a stock of 16.74 lakh tonnes of grains, according to data from the Food Planning and Monitoring Unit of the food ministry.

The stock started falling in June last year as distribution under the social safety net and other government programmes continued despite sluggish procurement of foodgrains.

Farmers and millers refrained from selling foodgrains to the food office at the government-fixed rates as the prices were soaring.

An increase in distribution of cereal among those affected by the Covid-19 pandemic and recurring floods also contributed to the drop in the stock, said the food ministry officials.

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An aircraft takes off from Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport while birds fly around it. Risk of bird strikes remain high at the airport as the authorities are unable to get the birds away from the airport properly. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

50 YRS OF INDEPENDENCE

Three high-profile visits this month

Indian PM, presidents of Maldives, Nepal to join celebration in Dhaka

PORIMOL PALMA

There will be a number of high-profile visits to Bangladesh later this month, including Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Maldives President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and Nepalese President Bidya Devi Bhandari, to attend the country's celebrations of 50 years of independence.

Additionally, some agreements and MoUs may be signed during the visits, which will also include formal meetings, officials said.

Modi, scheduled to visit on March 26-27, is likely to visit memorials of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Tungipara, which is also the birthplace of the Father of the Nation.

During the visit, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart are likely to inaugurate the passenger train between Dhaka and New Jalpaiguri in

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‘Mahbub out to disgrace EC’

CEC fumes after the commissioner says no level playing field in polls

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Chief Election Commissioner KM Nurul Huda yesterday came down on Election Commissioner Mahbub Talukdar after the latter said level playing field was not being ensured for all in polls.

At a programme in the Nirbachan Bhaban, Mahbub said voter turnout dropped alarmingly whenever Electronic Voting Machines were used.

He also said local government elections have turned into “a model of irregularities” due to polls violence, grabbing of polling centres, and vandalism of EVMs.

Immediately after the election commissioner's speech ended, the CEC went straight on to the stage and started criticising Mahbub. All the other commissioners and senior EC officials were present at the event, organised to mark the National Voters' Day.

“Mahbub Talukdar is doing whatever he could to disgrace and undermine the Election Commission He does not work in the interest of the EC. He works to protect his own interests.”

In his speech, Mahbub had said the staggered municipal polls were at its last stage. Besides, the union parishad elections will take place in phases from next month.

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KM Nurul Huda Mahbub Talukdar

MUSHTAQ'S DEATH

Conduct probe, review DSA

UN rights chief urges Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet has urged the Bangladesh government to ensure an investigation into the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed in custody is prompt, transparent and independent, and suspend application of the Digital Security Act.

“Bangladesh urgently needs to suspend the application of the Digital Security Act [DSA] and conduct a review of its provisions to bring them in line with the requirements of international human rights law. My office stands ready to continue its dialogue with the authorities in this regard,” she said in a statement on Monday.

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Digital Security Act Govt to ensure no arrest before probe

Says law minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government is taking measures to ensure that no one is arrested or sued under the Digital Security Act (DSA) before investigation, Law Minister Anisul Huq has said.

“We are thinking about incorporating a provision in the Digital Security Act so that no case is filed and none can be arrested under this law before an inquiry into the allegations is conducted,” he told The Daily Star last night.

“I have been engaged with the office of the Human Rights Commission in Geneva for the last few months for sharing information regarding the best practices of the Digital Security Act all over the world. I will engage in a dialogue on the same issue next week. I have a plan to form a monitoring team so that there can be no scope to abuse the law.”

Voices against the controversial DSA have grown even louder after the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed, who died in Kashimpur High-Security Jail-3 in Gazipur on Thursday. The government is trying to make a decision to ensure no one is arrested prior to investigation, the minister said.

Asked about bail under the act, the law minister said the government has prepared a set of rules regarding when to provide bail and when not to.

About the misuse of law, Huq said they are taking measures to stop it.

He, however, said the DSA is a “very necessary law” as

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BASIC BANK SCAMS

HC slams ACC for delays in probe

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday expressed utmost dissatisfaction and disappointment with the Anti-Corruption Commission for the long delay in completing investigations in the cases over BASIC Bank loan scams.

“More than five years have passed but the Anti-Corruption Commission is yet to submit charge sheets [to the lower court] in the cases filed for BASIC Bank loan scams. Will the investigation continue for an indefinite period?” the HC bench of Justice M Enayetur Rahim and Justice Md Mostafizur Rahman said.

The bench made the observation and asked the question while

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Taking a break from selling flowers, Munni, 8, tries her cricketing skills with a bat made out of the stem of a coconut tree leave in Central Shaheed Minar area of the capital. The child earns up to Tk 200 a day to support her mother, also a flower vendor. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

COVID FALLOUT ON FAST-TRACK PROJECTS

Some coping better than others

ADP allocation for 3 projects increase while three others see cuts

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

Annual allocations for the seven ADP-funded first-track projects have either increased or remained the same, a sign that those are coping well with the pandemic fallout.

Allocations for the three other projects, including that of the Padma bridge and the Rooppur nuclear power plant, have been slashed significantly in the government's revised annual development programme (ADP).

Padma Bridge Rail Link Project, which made headlines recently after its Chinese contractor alleged fund crisis, got around 50 percent more than the original allocation for the current fiscal year.

The National Economic Council, presided over by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, yesterday approved the revised ADP.

Apart from the rail link project, allocations for the Matarbari 1,200MW coal-fired power plant and the Payra Deep-sea Port have been increased.

ADP ALLOCATIONS INCREASE IN 3 PROJECTS

Padma rail link project +Tk 1,770 crore

Matarbari coal-fired power plant +Tk 528 crore

Payra Deep-sea Port + Tk 452 crore

The allocation for the Mass Rapid Transit Line-6 (MRT-6), under which the country's first ever metro rail is being built, remained the same, according to documents.

Apart from the Padma bridge and the Rooppur power plant projects, the allocation for Chattogram-Cox's Bazar Rail Line was also reduced.

The eighth fast-track project, Rampal Power Plan, is not being funded by the ADP.

Most of the projects are running behind schedule largely due to uncertainty over funding, the Gulshan cafe attack in 2016, complexity over designs, planning, and land acquisition.

When the project got momentum after most of the complexities were addressed, the pandemic slowed down work. Work on most projects remained almost halted for several months last year.

Various studies show that the country's GDP would increase by 3 to 4 percent when

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