

## Deal on importing hydropower from Nepal at final stage

Says foreign minister

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh, Nepal and India are at the final stage of confirming a deal that will allow Bangladesh to import hydropower from the Himalayan state, said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday.

"Three countries agreed on it. We are close to the final stage. We will buy electricity from Nepal. In winter, we can sell electricity when we have surplus," he said at a press conference on the meetings with Nepalese President Bidya Devi Bhandari, Bangladesh President Abdul Hamid and Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on Monday.

Bangladesh signed an MoU with Nepal in 2018 to oversee investment, development and trade in hydroelectricity between the two countries. Under this arrangement, Bangladesh will import up to 9,000 MW of hydropower from Nepal by 2040.

Initially, Bangladesh sought to buy hydropower from Nepal's Karnali Hydropower Project through GMR

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In plain sight of a large sign by Traffic Department of Dhaka Metropolitan Police that says rickshaws are not allowed on the Green Road-Farmgate intersection in the capital, the three-wheelers stand on the spot without a care. The photo was taken on Monday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## Wasa backtracks on water price hike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Dhaka Wasa will not be hiking water prices considering the worsening of the covid-19 situation.

The decision was made at the board meeting of Wasa held yesterday. "We did not approve the proposal for hiking water tariff by five percent, considering the pandemic. We will reconsider the matter when the situation goes back to normal," said Wasa Board Chairperson Dr Golam Mostafa.

The proposal was prepared to increase water prices by five percent for residential and commercial uses from July 1.

According to the proposal, the prices of each unit (1,000 litres) of water will be Tk 15.18 for residential use and Tk 42 for commercial use, increasing from the current prices of Tk 14.46 and Tk 40 respectively.

Earlier, Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB) termed the proposal of increasing water price during the novel coronavirus pandemic unacceptable, cold-blooded and inconsiderate.

"When people are struggling financially, the proposal to increase price of water is not acceptable in any way," CAB said in a press release yesterday. "This will increase living costs and cause great suffering to people," added the statement.

Earlier on Monday, Dr Golam Mostafa said the price hike was proposed to adjust with inflation.

"We only earn half of the production cost of water and we have to increase the price gradually to have a sustainable future for the company," he said.

Dhaka Wasa can increase the water tariff by five percent in consultation with the government as per section 22 of the Dhaka Water Supply and Sewerage Authority Act, 1996.

Brushing aside Wasa's rationale for increasing price, CAB said despite the price increasing every year, there are numerous complaints of supplying

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## 'Govt celebrating golden jubilee without people'

Alleges BNP leader Mirza Fakhrul

UNB, Dhaka

BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir yesterday alleged that the government is celebrating the golden jubilee of independence keeping people and freedom fighters "away".

"The government is celebrating the golden jubilee without people as it has become isolated from them. The freedom fighters have no place in the government's celebration programmes. Even political parties have no presence there," he said.

The BNP leader said only foreign guests are coming to Bangladesh to celebrate the golden jubilee and they are being told and shown that the country is on the crest of development.

Fakhrul made the remarks while talking to reporters after visiting BNP joint secretary general Habib-un-Nabi Khan Sohel at a hospital in the capital.

Sohel has been receiving treatment at the hospital as he was injured during a clash allegedly with law enforcers in front

of Jatiya Press Club on February 28.

Fakhrul said their party must welcome the foreign friends and heads of governments of five countries to the celebrations.

But he voiced anger as the government has "restricted" them from holding programmes the party has taken to celebrate the golden jubilee of independence on the "pretext of foreign guests' presence".

"People's movement is being obstructed," he alleged.

The BNP leader also questioned the purpose of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's upcoming visit to Bangladesh.

Modi is scheduled to visit Bangladesh on March 26 to attend the twin celebrations of Mujib Borsho and the golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence.

He will also visit Bangabandhu Memorial in Tungipara, Matua community in Kashiani, and a temple in Satkhira on March 27 before holding a bilateral meeting with Hasina.

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## Don't incite anarchy over Modi's visit

Obaidul Quader urges all

Bss, Dhaka

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday urged all concerned not to incite any chaos centring Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's forthcoming visit to Bangladesh.

He made the call at a regular press conference on contemporary issues at his official residence on parliament premises in Dhaka.

Quader, also general secretary of Awami League, said a vested quarter is hatching conspiracy to thwart the Indian premier's visit marking the birth centenary of Bangabandhu and golden jubilee of Bangladesh's independence.

Mentioning that India was the main ally of Bangladesh during the Liberation War, the minister said Bangladesh invited the head of the government of India, not any particular individual, on the occasion of the twin celebrations.

He said Modi is an invited guest and his visit has no link with any other issue.

About BNP secretary general Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir's comment that the party started getting organised to defeat the government, Quader said if BNP becomes politically organised, there is no problem.

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More than just a book fair, the Boimela is a place for hangouts too. A few lone visitors aside, yesterday it was home to groups of three, four and even more.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

EKUSHEY BOOK FAIR

## 'Better promotion would have drawn more visitors'

MATHEWS CHIRAN

As soon as the gate of Amar Ekushey book fair opened at 3pm yesterday, visitors started coming in. Among lone visitors and groups, there were students, couples, families university students, couples and families joining in the festivity of the fair.

Visiting the Boimela premise, this correspondent found visitors wandering around the stalls and sitting at different corners, particularly surrounding the lake adjacent to the Independence Monument. More than just an occasion to buy books, the fair looked like a place where people came to spend time with their loved ones.

"The Boimela is that one place where you get to buy books and chit-chat with your friends at the same time," said Ayesha Zaman, a visitor sitting on the grass with her friends. "This creates a culture of living and breathing among books." She had a couple of books in her hand, including 'Rabindranath o Somokalin Bangladesh' by Atiur Rahman from Bangla Prokash.

This correspondent came across two friends who were having a discussion following a session at the writers' corner adjacent to the lake. The conversation centered around the current situation of writers and literature.

Md Masud met his friend Shakhawat Hossain after a long time yesterday. Both big fans of fiction, they couldn't help but start a deep back and forth after attending the session on contemporary literature. "It was an eye opening experience. We got to know so much about how literature works

these days, and also how writers are faring faced with today's reading culture. This is only possible at the fair. You can buy books and discuss your favourite topics as well," said Masud, who bought a poetry collection of Rabindranath Tagore.

Bithi and Rajib came to the fair with their 10-year-old daughter Nowshin. There to spend the evening, they told this correspondent they had no idea the Boimela is taking place this year. "I got to know about it from a colleague. We made up our minds for a visit immediately, and here we are. We bought some books for our daughter. She's quite excited about the whole thing," Rajib said.

Overall, though the sixth day of the fair wasn't breaking records, publishers informed there was a moderate flow of visitors at the fair all day yesterday.

Bangla Prokash staff Samin Yasir said, "A lot of people are yet to know the fair is taking place, mainly due to its delayed start. Once widely known, the crowd will definitely increase. However, those who are in the know are coming, buying books, and socialising, and that's great for us." Some of the popular books flying off Bangla Prokash's shelves are 'Jonoker Mukh' by SM Shamsul Alam and 'Onno Rokom Onno Hobo' by Mahmud Khurshid.

People are also buying books from Shobdoshoi. Some of its key choices are: 'Time management' by Richard Walsh (translated by Fahim Morshed), 'Social Intelligence' by Daniel Golman (translated by Anika Nawar), and 'Shoiroshashoner Noy Bochor' by Major Rafiqul Islam.

## Cop among three held with phensedyl

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

Three people, including a sub-inspector (SI) of police, have been detained by Rapid Action Battalion (Rab) with 240 bottles of phensedyl and two guns from Narayanganj's Sonargaon upazila.

The arrests took place around 11pm on Monday near Meghna Toll Plaza area. The detained police personnel has been identified as Kaikobad Khan Pathan (30), a sub-inspector of Kalapahariya Police Outpost under Arahazar. The identities of the other detainees could not be known yet, said law enforcers.

"Tipped off, a team of Rab-3 set up a check-post in the area to search their vehicles. During search, police recovered 240 bottles of phensedyl and two guns from a private car with a police sticker. The three passengers of the car were detained in this connection," said Farzana Haque, senior assistant director of Rab-3.

"Primary interrogation revealed one of the detainees to be an SI of police. Hence it is likely that one of the guns belongs to the government while the other might be illegally possessed," the Rab official said, adding the detainees and seized items were handed over to Sonargaon Police Station.

Confirming the incident, Rafiqul Islam, officer-in-charge (OC) of Sonargaon Police Station, told The Daily Star that filing of a case was underway.

## Torture in police custody: Serious cause for concern

LAW REVIEW

LAW DESK

In the aftermath of the death of writer Mushtaq Ahmed in custody, the nation was shocked to hear the details of the treatment of his fellow co-accused, cartoonist Ahmed Kabir Kishore, in police custody.

The cartoonist, who was arrested on charges under the Digital Security Act 2018, was detained for 10 months after being arrested in May last year until he was granted bail on March 3.

Torture in police custody remains a massive cause of concern in Bangladesh, particularly with the enactment and implementation of the provisions of the Digital Security Act 2018.

Rights groups and legal experts have consistently pointed to the misuse of the Act to silence dissent through intimidation and torture. Bangladesh acceded to the United Nations Convention against Torture and Other Cruel Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment, 1984 (UNCAT) in 1998 but did not submit a state party report to the Committee until 2019.

Previously, the High Court Division of the Supreme Court noted with concern the human rights violation that takes place as a result of

the widespread practice of "remand" wherein detainees are taken in for questioning and obtaining confession through use of force.

The High Court Division's judgement in a writ petition laid down some directions to be followed by law enforcement officers to ensure the arrestee's rights under the Constitution. Subsequently, the Appellate Division issued its own directions while hearing appeal of the case in the light of the enactment of the Torture and Custodial Death (Prevention) Act 2013.

But the 2013 Act has remained largely ineffective and the first ever verdict under the law was given in 2020 by Dhaka Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court, where the deceased's family was awarded compensation of Tk 2 lakh.

Despite the aforementioned legal remedies and judicial decisions, custodial torture has remained a consistent practice in Bangladesh.

According to the statistics of Ain o Salish Kendra, 75 people died in custody in 2020 and eight died in custody in January 2021 alone.

In light of the growing concerns of custodial torture, especially with regard to detention under the DSA, it is high time for the government to live up to the applicable international human rights standards.

## Serving jail time by proxy

Woman agreed to be in prison instead of actual accused in exchange for money

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Ctg

When "Kulsuma Akhter" came to the Chattogram Central Jail in 2018 with a conviction warrant in hand, after being convicted in a murder case, she had all the correct answers -- the name of her father, husband, home addresses and other related information.

So the jail authorities jotted those down in a register book for convicted prisoners and took her photograph before registering her as an inmate.

What the prison authorities did not know was that she was serving a jail term by proxy for money while the actual criminal remained scot-free.

The above information came to light after the prison authorities found out about the issue seeing discrepancies in their register books -- one for under trial prisoners and one for convicted ones -- and informed the court.

Yesterday, the Chattogram jail superintendent appeared before a court in Chattogram with the register books to explain the situation. As per the court order, Md Shafiqul Islam Khan appeared before the court of 4th Additional Metropolitan Session Judge Shariful Alam.

Court sources said one Kohinur Begum, an apparel worker, was killed in her rented house in port city's Rahmatganj area on July 9, 2006 following an altercation over a mobile phone.

Over the murder, a case was lodged with Kotwali Police Station and police arrested one Kulsuma Akhter and sent her to jail in 2007.

She later walked out of jail on bail.

On November 30, 2017, a court in Chattogram sentenced her to life-term imprisonment in absentia after trial.

Asked, Jail superintendent Shafiqul Islam Khan said, "Kulsuma landed in Chattogram jail in 2007 as an under-trial prisoner. During that time, her name and photograph were registered in the under-trial prisoners' book.

But she later got out on bail after serving a year, he added.

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Coming in at about 350 kgs, this Baghair fish (devil catfish) was caught from the river Kushiara yesterday. This photograph was taken at Sylhet city's Lalbazar, where trader Milal Mia was seen asking Tk 3.5 lakh as the selling price. This near-threatened species of fish is considered a rare treat at the market, and the seller said he would cut up the fish for sale if no buyer can afford it whole.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## Why govt shouldn't be directed to digitise marriage reg: HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday wanted to know why the government should not be directed to take necessary steps to digitise marriage and divorce registrations to save people from fraudulence.

The HC issued a rule asking the authorities concerned to explain in four weeks why a direction should not be given upon them to take necessary steps to this effect.

In the rule, the court also asked the respondents to show causes why they should not be ordered to preserve the information of marriage and divorce registrations by developing a central website.

Secretaries to the ministries of law, religious affairs and information technology, and chairman of Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission have been made respondents to the rule.

The HC bench of Justice Md Mozibur Rahman Miah and Justice Md Kamrul Hossain Mollah came up with the rule after hearing a writ petition.

Aid for Men Foundation and three people collectively submitted the petition

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