

No reason

FROM PAGE 1

"We have also talked to them [Birdem doctors]. They also have not confirmed [the matter] to us. But we are investigating the matter," Prof Khurshid said.

Meanwhile, Nazmul Islam, spokesperson of the Directorate General of Health Services (DGHS), yesterday said a guideline on preventing and treating black fungus infection might be issued soon.

"It [black fungus] can only cause an outbreak in some special situation. We are closely observing the development. We hope it won't get out of hand," he told a virtual briefing.

Mucormycosis has specific treatment, he said. "There is no evidence that it infects many people. But the treatment is definitely expensive."

The clinical management committee of the DGHS has been working to adopt a guideline as early as possible, he informed.

"We will give specific proposals within a very short time because the drugs needed to treat black fungus are not easily available. Considering this, we are working so that no one can take advantage [of the situation]," he said.

A team of experts is examining the people said to be infected with black fungus, he said, urging everyone to wait for the findings of the experts.

According to the United States Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Mucormycetes, the group of fungi that cause mucormycosis, are more common in soil than in air, and in summer and fall than in winter or spring. Most people come in contact with microscopic fungal spores every day. So, it's probably impossible to completely avoid coming in contact with mucormycetes."

These fungi aren't harmful to most people. However, for people who have weakened immune systems, breathing in mucormycete spores can cause an infection in the lungs or sinuses which can spread to other parts of the body."

Bangladesh

FROM PAGE 12

consisted of Noorjahan Murshed, who was elected to the Pakistan National Assembly, Phani Bhushan Majumdar and Shah Moazzem Hussain. About 60 MPs belonging to different Indian political parties attended the meeting.

Phani Bhushan Majumdar said the recognition by India of the Bangladesh government would certainly boost the morale of the Bangladesh people, enhance prestige of the newborn state and inspire other countries to follow suit.

LECTURE SERIES ON BANGLADESH OPENED
The Bangladesh martyrs memorial lecture series was inaugurated at a function recently held at the Indian Association Hall under the auspices of Lekhok-Shilpi-Sikshabrat-O-Samajkarmi Sangha.

Tracing the liberation movement during the past 23 years, Kamaruzzaman, president of the Bangladesh Sikhak Sahayak Samiti and in-charge of the educational and cultural affairs of the Bangladesh government, gave a vivid account of how poor countrymen of East Pakistan were being exploited by the West Pakistani ruling clique.

US PLAN FOR FOOD RELIEF IN EAST PAKISTAN

On May 27, 1971, Executive Secretary of the US Department of State Theodore Eliot sent a memorandum to the US President's Assistant for National Security Affairs Henry Kissinger as to the planning for food relief in East Pakistan:

"We have already taken initial steps to ensure that food is available in India for refugees from Pakistan. Beyond this, however, looms the potentially much greater problem of food shortages in East Pakistan itself, which normally must import two million tonnes of food annually. There is now sufficient food either in stock or awaiting shipment to East Pakistan, but the critical problem is distribution. We believe that about 1.5 million people in the area hit by cyclones last November are now in dire need of food, and there is likely to be a food shortage throughout the province unless the Government of Pakistan mounts a large-scale relief program within the next few months. An Interdepartmental Working Group has been set up to coordinate all aspects of our contribution to relief work in Bengal but we recognize that neither we nor any outside donor can be of more than marginal help in meeting the problem."

Shamsuddoza Sajen is a journalist and researcher. He can be contacted at sajen1986@gmail.com

Interest burden 6pc heavier in next fiscal

FROM PAGE 1

the savings instruments, whereas most of the banks are collecting deposits at 4 percent interest at most.

Subsequently, sales of national savings certificates in the first nine months of the fiscal year overshot the full-year target by 66 percent.

The government had set a target of borrowing Tk 20,000 crore by way of savings certificates in fiscal 2020-21.

"When the banks are sitting on excess liquidity, why are we taking on debt through savings certificates? This is unnecessary," said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

The government could have very well gotten the funds at 2-3 percent interest had it turned to the banks, which are sitting on excess liquidity of about Tk 198,400 crore as of March, up a whopping 120.7 percent from a year earlier.

What is more, the government was a loser in two ways for its excessive borrowing through savings certificates: a big amount that it mopped up was black money.

On one hand, the black money holders had evaded tax over the years, and on the other hand, they would be getting higher interest on the sum.

In the first nine months of the fiscal year, a record Tk 14,295 crore

was legalised, and a major sum was by investing in savings certificates and fixed deposits.

"Given the state of the economy, we could have easily taken on more debt. And we could have done better on the loans we are taking and the interest we are paying," Hussain said, adding that the government's foreign aid use could have been better.

External debt indicators are below their thresholds and the public debt level is below the benchmark under the baseline and stress test scenarios, said a recent report of the International Monetary Fund.

As of September last year, the government's stock of outstanding foreign loans stands at \$45.3 billion, according to the Economic Relations Division of the finance ministry.

The interest rate on funds from the WB is 1.25 percent, the Asian Development Bank 2 percent and from Japan International Cooperation Agency less than 1 percent.

Besides, as of April, about \$50.2 billion of foreign aid is sitting idle in the pipeline, while the WB, the ADB and other development partners have expressed their intent to provide budget support to the Bangladesh economy to better manage the pandemic whirlwind.

More funds would flow into

Bangladesh give the negative interest rates in the developed world but the Bangladesh government's low absorption capacity is getting in the way.

The government's foreign aid utilisation has improved and it is thanks to different steps taken in recent times, said Kazi Shafiqul Islam, a former ERD secretary.

Foreign aid utilisation in a year hovered around the \$6 billion-mark but in fiscal 2019-20, it was about \$7.3 billion -- which is the highest yet.

If the \$735 million of cash support from the IMF for the pandemic is considered, the amount crosses the \$8 billion-mark.

And Bangladesh's under par foreign aid utilisation is not always of its doing, according to Islam.

"Delays take place because of issues on both sides."

The donor side lays out conditions for projects, particularly for procurement, which can be time-consuming.

"Those conditions are sometimes necessary as there is less corruption."

On the Bangladesh side, there are efficiency issues amongst the ministries and divisions.

"Projects are revised many times," Islam added.

Regardless, the government needs

to undertake reforms to address the weak fiscal capacity, which necessitates turning to expensive borrowing instruments, said Ashikur Rahman, senior economist at the Policy Research Institute, a think-tank.

"Our current tax to GDP ratio is extremely low and is around 8 percent, which contradicts what was planned in the 7th Five-Year Plan [2016-2020] and 8th Five-Year Plan [2021-2025]. This underscores the urgency with which finance ministry should prioritise critical fiscal reforms that should, over time, reduce our dependence on expensive borrowing instruments," he added.

At the granular level, the higher interest payments mean the government has less to spend on important areas such as infrastructure, health and education systems, and social protection, said Syed Akhtar Mahmood, a former economist of the WB.

"Increasing interest payments are a consequence of high and increasing public debt, which, in turn, is due to a mismatch between government expenditures and revenues. Thus, it is important that government makes a greater effort to boost its revenue earnings -- our tax/GDP ratio is rather low -- and ensure that its expenditures are efficient," he added.

Souls founder Ronny Barua passes away

FROM PAGE 12

nurturing his own dreams of making music as a part of a band. He was further motivated by "Guru" Azam Khan and his band Uchcharon, with Azam Khan being a revolutionary trendsetter for upcoming musicians of that era.

In 1974, he founded Souls alongside Tajul Imam, Sajed Ul Alam, Momtazul Hoque Lulu and Ahmed Nawaz.

Over the years, artistes like Tapan Chowdhury, Naquib Khan, Ayub Bachchu, Partha Barua, and Pilu Khan joined, making the band sound unique and etching a place in the hearts of Bangladeshi listeners.

"Ronny da was an excellent artiste and an amazing human being. His contributions as one of the founding members of Souls were exemplary," shares National Award-winning singer and composer Bappa Mazumdar. "He

was suffering from cancer for a long time and after so many hardships, he lost the battle. I extend my sincerest condolences to his family."

Having graduated in design in 1979, Ronny was also a prominent figure in theatre, directing background music, lighting and set for many plays for Arindyam Natya Sampradaya, including "Elebele", "Paap Punya", "Laalshalu", "Shajan Megh".

Celebrated lyricist Shahid Mahmud Jangi expressed grief at the artiste's passing, as did many members of the musical fraternity on social media.

"My childhood friend, founding member of Souls and everyone's beloved Subrata Barua Ronny has left us," he wrote on Facebook. "My condolences to his family." He had written many famous songs for Renaissance, Souls and LRB, having formed a close bond with Subrata Barua Ronny.

With organisations Chattogram Charushipli Sangathan and Shaikatchari, Ronny actively worked to ensure the district's first Pohela Boishakh celebrations. For 15 years, he had overseen Chattogram Shilpakala Academy's Pohela Boishakh Celebrations as well. Ronny was also a pivotal member of Bangladesh Designers' Forum.

Legendary music director and keyboardist of Feedback, Foad Nasser Babu reminisced his relationship with the artiste. "Although he was senior to me, I shared a very friendly relationship with him. We had numerous conversations about music and its development. He was someone that we could depend upon blindly."

"For any suggestions or comments, I could always reach out to him and he would do the same. A brilliant drummer and musician, I believe he was the real 'soul' of Souls. I am deeply

saddened by his demise. He was one of our key supporters when we were trying to set up the Bangladesh Musical Bands Association, also known as BAMB. He was a great friend to Feedback. We worked closely with him and learnt a lot. I convey my prayers and hope he is in a better place now."

Nasim Ali Khan from Souls, on his Facebook post yesterday, said,

"This is a very sad day for me. One of my musical mentors, the selfless soul of Souls, has left for eternity. He was a friend and a soulmate who always inspired me in my strive. Rony da, we shall miss you terribly. You have been an icon and always shall remain one. May you bask in the grace of Allah SWT in heaven till we meet again."

Subrata Barua Ronny's last rites took place yesterday at the Chattogram Buddha Temple. He is survived by his wife, a son and a daughter.

Mobs loot 50 shops of Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 1

Brandfort saw the latest wave of attacks on Tuesday after protests broke out there over poor service delivery by the local government, said Sumon Chowdhury, a Bangladeshi businessman who has been in South Africa for 17 years.

Sumon has several shops and malls in Bloemfontein and Brandfort. He said all his shops in Brandfort have been vandalised and looted on Tuesday.

He claimed that this was the first time shops and malls of foreigners were attacked in Brandfort even though such attacks were common in other places of South Africa.

Anisur Rahman, whose four shops were looted and vandalised

in Bloemfontein, told The Daily Star yesterday that several hundred Bangladeshis in Brandfort were living in fear.

"I have friends in Brandfort who told me that they were scared after the attack," said Anisur, who has been in South Africa for 11 years.

"Following the attacks in Bloemfontein, we didn't get any support from our high commission in South Africa. Likewise, Bangladeshis living in Brandfort are yet to get any help from the high commission."

After the attacks in Bloemfontein, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told The Daily Star that law and order in different parts of South Africa had been not good over the years.

"We are working on how to address

the situation. We have already asked the Bangladesh high commissioner in South Africa to collect information about the incidents," he had told The Daily Star.

According to an estimate of the Bangladesh high commission in South Africa, around three lakh Bangladeshis live in the country. Most of them are involved in businesses while a small number of them have white collar jobs.

Quoting local authorities, news portal The South African reported that at least 70 people were arrested until May 19 after protests began against raw sewage flowing on the streets, poor sanitation, lack of public toilets, unfinished local government projects and public representatives indulging

in corruption.

The tragic killing of a juvenile, who was allegedly shot by a security guard, further intensified the protests.

Daily Maverick, a news portal in South Africa, on Friday reported that frustration with service delivery failures resulted in 585 incidents of public protest between January 2013 and April 2021, 378 (65 percent) of which turned violent.

The xenophobic attacks on foreigners and their businesses are fuelled by the misguided perception that foreigners are reducing economic opportunities for South Africans, it said.

Despite repeated attempts, this newspaper could not reach officials of the Bangladesh high commission in Pretoria for comments.

No headway in six years

FROM PAGE 12

of its total broad-gauge network, has been electrified by March this year, according to the website of Central Organisation for Railway Electrification (CORE).

CORE, which is responsible for electrification of railway tracks in India, plans to electrify all broad-gauge routes by December 2023.

A former chief electrical engineer of BR said introduction of electric trains in Bangladesh would reduce operation and maintenance costs. Besides, the trains are environment friendly.

The cost of an electric locomotive is much less than that of a diesel locomotive. The BR now spends a huge amount of money on diesel, the engineer said.

He said launching of electric traction system using the existing rail tracks is possible.

Another BR engineer said a diesel locomotive has around 40,000 parts, including a lot of moving ones.

The maintenance cost of an electric locomotive is less as it has fewer moving parts.

LONG DELAY
Bangladesh Railway in February 2015 had sent a proposal to the railways ministry on carrying out feasibility study on converting Dhaka-Chattogram section for electric traction, BR documents show.

The ministry in June that year had asked BR to add Dhaka-Narayanganj section with the Dhaka-Chattogram section. Accordingly, the BR modified the proposal and sent it to the Planning Commission in August that year.

In January 2016, Planning Commission asked BR to modify the proposal again and fixed the feasibility study cost at Tk 8.12 crore against the proposed figure of Tk 9.58 crore.

Two months later, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina gave directives to introduce electric trains on Narayanganj-Gazipur section in the first phase. Subsequently, Planning

Commission in July 2016 asked BR to modify their proposal to conduct the feasibility study on Narayanganj-Dhaka-Joydebpur section, instead of the Dhaka-Chattogram section.

The BR again sent their modified proposal in June 2017. But the Planning Commission held the second meeting on the proposal in July 2019.

In the meantime, the decision changed again following the directives of the government high ups and Bangladesh Railway sent a revised proposal, a BR official said wishing not to be named.

A section of railway officials, who are benefiting from the decades-old diesel-powered rail operation system, are working against the move, three current and retired BR officials claimed.

A huge amount of money is spent for procurement and maintenance of diesel engines and diesel and those officials fear that they would lose

their benefits once the electric traction system is introduced, they said.

"So, they are working against the initiative," a BR official said.

According to officials, once the electric traction system is launched, it will cut 35 percent operation cost and 30 to 50 percent maintenance cost. Besides, it would reduce carbon emission by 20 to 30 percent.

BR Director General Dharendra Nath Mazumder said electric train was something very new for BR and that's why it was not possible for them to introduce the electric traction system overnight.

"Many things, including new electric engines, are involved with this system. So, introduction of the system is supposed to take time," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Asked why it was taking six years to start conducting the feasibility study, Dharendra Nath said he has to check documents before commenting on the reasons for the delay.

Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 12

Bangladesh Yousef SY Ramadan at the state guesthouse Padma.

"If anyone goes there, that person will be liable to prosecution. There have been such instances."

The minister mentioned that the government never allowed anyone to visit Israel. And the immigration officials will stop anyone from traveling to Israel as they did in the past.

There has been confusion recently over whether Bangladeshis can travel to Israel as the words "except Israel" have been dropped from "This passport is valid for all countries of the world except Israel" printed in e-passport.

The minister had earlier clarified that this was done to maintain the international standard of the passport and it does not mean, in anyway, a change in Bangladesh's foreign policy. Bangladesh maintains its travel ban on Israel.

At yesterday's event, Momen said Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman was a strong supporter of the Palestinians. Bangladesh, since its independence, has been providing assistance to Palestine and wants a Two-State solution as per the pre-1967 border.

"Bangladesh raised the Palestine issue time and again at the UN General Assembly. We believe one day an independent and sovereign Palestine will be established."

Beacon Pharmaceuticals Ltd Managing Director Mohammad Ebadul Karim handed over medicines worth Tk 40 lakh to the foreign minister. The humanitarian assistance will be sent to the Palestinians, who faced devastation during the 11-day war between Israel and Hamas.

Momen mentioned that Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will provide \$50,000 as humanitarian assistance to the Palestinians. Besides, different organisations and individuals are extending their help to them.

Mango traders

FROM PAGE 12

Mohammad Shaju, another trader, said he had leased a garden with 300 mango trees at Betbaria village in the district's Sadar upazila spending Tk 4 lakh.

He also could not earn a penny yesterday by selling the mangoes, he said.

Muhammad Nazrul Islam, deputy director of Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in the district, said the district's economy depended on mango trade.

A total of 34,738-hectare land in the district is used for mango cultivation. The production target was 2.5 lakh metric tonnes this year, he added.

Contacted, the agriculture department officials said no restriction was imposed on mango farmers and traders. They could send their produce to other districts maintaining health guidelines.

According to the traders, Gopalbhog mangoes were being sold between Tk 1,400 and Tk 1,500 per maund (40kg).

Seals helping

FROM PAGE 12

That's why a team from the Sea Mammal Research Unit at the University of St Andrews, in Scotland, enlisted the help of some of Antarctica's permanent residents: seals.

The furry, aquatic mammals thrive year-round in the freezing climate and can dive up to 3,000 feet below the water's surface, said Lars Boehme, an oceanographer and one of the project's leaders.

By fitting the seals with sensors, the researchers gain insight into the seals habits and ecology, while also gathering data from inaccessible parts of the ocean.

Scientists around the world are now drawing on this data to learn more about the Antarctic environment and how it could impact climate change.

Researchers have been tagging seals since 2004 to gather environmental information from around Antarctica. However, little was known about the Amundsen Sea in West Antarctica, where two of the continent's fastest melting glaciers -- Pine Island Glacier and Thwaites Glacier -- are located. So in 2014, Boehme led a team to tag seals there.

While six seal species live in Antarctica, only Weddell and southern elephant seals dive into the deeper layers of the ocean -- the main reason these species were chosen for data collection, said Boehme.

The seals are hunted by orcas and other seals in the water, but have no land predators, so the scientists can approach them easily. "They're not running away," said Boehme.

The team members sedate the seals with a blow dart and glue a smartphone-sized sensor to the fur on the backs of their heads. The process doesn't hurt the animals or impact their social lives, said Boehme. Seals molt annually, so the device falls off after a year.

Boehme said the team is careful to minimize their interactions with the seals. Tagging up to 14 seals per trip in 2014, 2019, and 2020, the team have got the process down to just 10 minutes per seal he said, and are working to reduce the size of the devices.

BBS CABLES
more than safety
BBS Cables Ltd. Configure Repair Towers (P/Factor), Skips, Mobile Bunkers, Praga/Searon, Dhaka 1212.
Tel: +88 02 22294771, 22299813 Fax: +88 02 22260772 web: www.bbscables.com.bd

"EARNINGS CALL"
We are pleased to inform you that the Company will arrange an "Earnings Call" to discuss on the financial results of **Third Quarter (Q3)** for the FY 2020-2021 of the Company on **Tuesday 01 June, 2021** at 3:30 PM via live webcast at the following link of <https://bbscables.bdinvestor.invescon.html> with participant's details. The shareholders or research analyst or financial reporters or other stakeholders can participate in the event by visiting the above link. To participate in the question and answer session, the prior registration is required by filling up the registration form in <http://bbscables.com.bd/investor/invescon.html> with participant's details. The details of Earnings Call can be available in the website (www.bbscables.com.bd) of the Company.

Place: Dhaka;
Date: 26 May, 2021

For BBS Cables Ltd.
SD/-
Md. Nazmul Hasan ACS
Company Secretary

Two journos, Somoy TV CEO sued under DSA

FROM PAGE 12

from Chunarughat in Habiganj.

The plaintiff filed the case after Somoy TV ran the report under the headline "Adaloter Tritiyo Srenir Karmacharir Aboidho Sampader Pahar" (mountain of illegal assets of a third class employee of a court) on February 23.

Alamgir in the case statement claimed that the report was "untrue, false, fake, baseless, vindictive and defamatory".

He also filed a Tk 10 crore defamation

case with the First Joint District Judge's Court in Noakhali on May 5 against the same six accused over running the report.

The complainant said his and his family's reputation and prestige were damaged due to the broadcasting of the "false" report by Somoy TV.

Contacted, journalist Afzal, an accused in the cases, said they prepared the report based on the charge sheets in two corruption cases against Alamgir.

The Anti-Corruption Commission had

filed the two cases against Alamgir on charges of amassing illegal wealth and laundering money, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Afzal also said he did not know the three other co-accused in the two cases and that he had no idea why they were accused.

Describing the Digital Security Act, 2018 as a gag on the free press, different rights bodies and platforms of journalists have criticised use of the law against the media, journalists and rights activists.