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"I would like to clearly say Awami League won't be able to hang onto power as people will ensure their fall through a strong movement ..."

BNP SECRETARY GENERAL MIRZA FAKHRUL ISLAM ALAMGIR



"Elections are going on all over the world. The pandemic has not stopped elections, because the importance of elections is different, maybe even more than that of the coronavirus."

CHIEF ELECTION COMMISSIONER KM NURUL HUDA IN BARISHAL



"The world needs a stronger global surveillance system to detect new epidemic and pandemic risks."

WHO CHIEF TEDROS ADHANOM GHEBREYESUS AFTER G7 LEADERS AGREE ON PANDEMIC PACT

BUDGET FOR 2021-22

Pressing issues left unaddressed

Say speakers at a CPD webinar

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The proposed budget for the fiscal year 2021-22 has failed to address pressing issues related to healthcare, poverty, unemployment, and CMSMEs even though they required special attention to protect lives and livelihoods amid the pandemic.

The needs of the poor and the marginalised have also been ignored in the budget, experts and speakers at a webinar also said.

They made the comments while speaking at a virtual budget dialogue organised by private think-tank Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) yesterday. Two lawmakers, including a minister, business chamber leaders, government high-ups and labour leaders, among others, participated in the webinar, moderated by CPD Distinguished Fellow Mustafizur Rahman.

Despite the pandemic, allocation for the healthcare sector did not go up for the coming fiscal year compared to the average growth of the allotment in previous years.

The total budget allocation for the sector has been proposed to be increased by 12 percent from Tk 29,247 crore in 2020-21 to Tk 32,731 crore in 2021-22, which is lower

MAJOR ISSUES IN PROPOSED BUDGET

- Fails to address healthcare, poverty, unemployment, CMSMEs
- Lawmakers cannot discuss much on budget in JS
- Unemployment insurance scheme absent
- Guideline for vaccinating 13cr people not addressed

than the 14 percent average annual increase in the total budget allocation for healthcare between 2010-11 and 2021-22. It is only 0.9 percent of the GDP.

In its presentation at the programme, the CPD said how the allocation was increased indicated that the raise was business as usual and it was nothing out of the ordinary. It happened despite the fact that the healthcare sector was reeling from the Covid shock.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury, chairman of

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An illegal dockyard in the capital's Muktarpur, Keraniganj, not only occupies the bank of the Buriganga, but also has its launch ramp fenced well into the river. The Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority clearly fails to deter the encroachment. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Positivity rate highest since April 22

STAR REPORT

The health directorate yesterday reported that detection of new Covid-19 cases has increased by 27.2 percent this week.

With the rising trend in transmission, believed to be caused by the Delta variant, ill-prepared hospitals across the bordering districts in Khulna and Rajshahi divisions have been struggling with a surge in the number of patients.

In the past 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, the positivity rate against 11,590 tests countrywide was 14.12 percent -- the highest in the last seven weeks.

Earlier on April 22, the positivity rate was 14.63 percent against 27,429 tests countrywide, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

Experts said, the mainland can be hit anytime by the delta variant -- known as the Indian variant of novel coronavirus -- due to the lack of enforcement of health safety guidelines.

... hospitals in many parts of the country, including Dhaka, may be underprepared to deal with the delta

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The allure is a free pass to extort

From among dozens of aspirants, AL picks Aga Khan Mintu for Dhaka-14 JS seat left vacant after Aslamul's death

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and ZYMA ISLAM

For the past month, every lamppost, electric pole and balustrade in the neighbourhoods in Dhaka-14 constituency was strung up with technicolor posters of at least 33 politicians vying to be the oarsman of one boat -- that of the seat left empty by deceased parliamentarian Aslamul Haque.

Yesterday, Aga Khan Mintu beat the odds, when he was nominated the Awami League candidate for the seat. The veteran politician is the president of Shah Ali unit Awami League, a former councillor and a chairperson of Muktiyoddha Market, a gigantic, crumbling retail behemoth which greets incomers into the neighbourhood of Mirpur-1.

Dhaka-14 consists of areas under Shah Ali, Rupnagar, Mirpur, part of Kalyanpur, and Darussalam police stations, and a section of Savar's Pakundia union.

Among those that Mintu defeated are deceased parliamentarian Aslamul's wife Maksuda Haque. In a political atmosphere where widows are often passed down the mantle, her contestation

was expected -- but it seemed like every other ward councillor, and the heads of every single neighbourhood AL unit made a mad dash for the seat in parliament.

But why was this of so much interest? The aspirants themselves say it's because Dhaka-14 has the largest extortion rings in the city -- two highways into Dhaka and two rivers, which makes this seat a trading hub.

All candidates interviewed said as much: There are so many applicants because a large section of the people vying for the seat are involved with extortion themselves, and before Aslamul's death, had been among his network of collectors.

Among the hopefuls were some odd ones -- like Germany-residing Zillur Rahman, the senior co-president of German Awami League whose posters were being hung up on the streets of Avenue 3 of Mirpur-1 outside the ward councillor's office.

When the people stringing up the posters were asked why someone from Germany is looking to represent a seat in Dhaka, they said, "If he is chosen, he will move back."

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Shakib handed 3-match ban, Tk 5 lakh fine

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh all-rounder Shakib Al Hasan was yesterday banned for three matches and fined five lakh taka for losing his temper and taking his frustration out on the stumps during a Bangabandhu Dhaka Premier Division T20 League game in Mirpur on Friday.

The decision came following plenty of hullabaloo and a lengthy wait as the Cricket Committee of Dhaka Metropolitan (CCDM), who are regulating the tournament, took almost a day to announce that it had found Shakib in breach of a Level 3 offence of the BCB code of conduct

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Expel errant party men

Hasina tells party's parliamentary board meet

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Awami League President Sheikh Hasina yesterday ordered making a list of errant and controversial leaders and activists and expelling them from the party, insiders said.

She expressed annoyance over the rifts and divisions between leaders of different units and asked the party men to resolve the internal conflicts, or to dissolve the committees concerned.

Hasina, also the prime minister, gave the directives at the AL's Parliamentary Board meeting at the Gono Bhaban yesterday.

The subject of internal feud was brought up when the meeting participants were discussing a conflict between the president and general secretary of Faridpur AL and the selection of an AL nominee for the Cumilla-5 by-polls.

It was decided in the meeting that the AL nominee for Cumilla-5 will be Abul Hashem Khan.

Hashem Khan, president of Burichang AL and former president of Cumilla Bar Association, got the AL ticket to run for Burichong upazila chairman in 2019. But Aklakh Haider, now general secretary of Burichong upazila AL, defeated him.

The AL also picked Aga Khan Mintu, president of Shah Ali AL, as the nominee for Dhaka-14, and Habibur Rahman,

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Closure of schools extended to June 30

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday extended the closure of schools and colleges to June 30.

Officials earlier discussed partially reopening the schools from today.

The decision was taken in consultation with the National Technical Advisory Committee on Covid-19 and it aims to ensure the safety of students, teachers, other employees and parents, according to separate statements by the primary and mass education ministries.

Students who would take the SSC and HSC exams would get priority when in-person classes reopen and the authorities will bring as many students as possible to the classrooms while maintaining social distance, a top education ministry official said.

On March 17 last year, the government closed

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Jaywalkers in the capital's Shantinagar use a hole in the metal barrier on the road to go across the street even though a crosswalk is quite close. Besides putting themselves in harm's way, they slow down motorists and contribute to congestion. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Hajj again only for people within KSA

Biman, hajj agencies to lose revenue 2nd year in row

RASHIDUL HASAN

Private hajj agencies and Biman Bangladesh Airlines will lose huge revenue for the second consecutive year as the Saudi government has decided not to allow anyone from abroad to perform hajj amid the pandemic.

Around 1,250 members of Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (Haab), a platform of private hajj agencies, will be deprived of an estimated revenue of Tk 2,500 crore, and Biman Bangladesh Airlines Tk 800 crore due to this decision, officials said.

Saudi Arabia has restricted the annual pilgrimage to its citizens and residents of the country and set a maximum limit of 60,000 pilgrims for this year, the state-run Saudi Press Agency reported yesterday.

Only those aged between 18 and 65 and vaccinated against Covid-19 will be able to take part in the rituals, the report added.

Meanwhile, State Minister for Religious Affairs Faridul Haque Khan yesterday in a statement said pilgrims from outside Saudi Arabia would not be able to perform hajj this year due to the global pandemic situation.

This would be the second consecutive year in Saudi Arabia's modern history that the hajj will be held without the participation of Muslims from outside the kingdom.

Only 10,000 Muslim residents of Saudi Arabia were allowed to perform hajj last year, down from the 2.5 million Muslims from around the world in 2019, according to media reports.

Sources at Biman said the national flag carrier had earned Tk 798 crore in 2019 by transporting Bangladeshi pilgrims to and from Saudi Arabia.

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