



The Daily Star

www.thedailystar.net

SECOND EDITION

REGD. No. DA 781

VOL. XXXI No. 300

AGRAHAYAN 6, 1428 BS

Your Right to Know

RABIU SANI 15, 1443 HJRI

16 PAGES PRICE : Tk12.00



Foreign trip spree amid pandemic

Railways minister, officials plan 4 tours in next 3 months; finance ministry circular asking for avoiding all routine trips still in effect

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh Railway and railways ministry officials will make four trips to Europe, the USA, and India over the next three months despite the pandemic for what they said would be studies, receiving training, and visiting factories.

The officials are embarking on these trips after the government withheld 50 percent of this fiscal year's allocation for foreign trips and asked officials to cancel the routine tours.

The money can only be spent during emergencies and unavoidable circumstances, said a finance ministry circular on July 1.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujon, who will lead an eight-member delegation on a 13-day trip to four European countries from Tuesday, said the visits were long overdue

➤ **8-member team to visit Europe this week**

➤ **4 officials to visit India in December**

➤ **10-member team to visit US in January**

➤ **12 officials to visit US in February**

and would be needed for different purposes.

Expenditure of the minister-led team would be borne by the government exchequer while contractors of two BR projects will pay the expenses of the three others, according to documents.

This newspaper, however, could not learn how much money is expected to be spent on the tours.

Before the pandemic, officials made foreign trips every year to participate in training, meetings, and seminars, spending taxpayer money.

In some cases, project implementing agencies created provisions for foreign tours for officials who had nothing to do with the project.

There has been criticisms over such

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3



BNP supporters fast en masse on VIP Road in Nayapalton while demonstrating yesterday for Khaleda Zia's treatment at a hospital abroad. The BNP chairperson is currently being treated at the Evercare Hospital where doctors are monitoring her vitals round the clock.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

On the verge of losing it all

AL set to sue Gazipur mayor under DSA, ask LGRD ministry to remove him

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Ousted from the Awami League, Gazipur Mayor Mohammad Zahangir Alam is now set to face legal action by the ruling party and is on the verge of losing his mayorship for making controversial remarks on Bangabandhu and the Liberation War.

The ruling AL has decided to take legal steps against him at a meeting of the party's central working committee on Friday night.

Party President Sheikh Hasina, at the meeting, had given directions to file a case against Zahangir, said meeting insiders.

Speaking to The Daily Star, a member of the AL central committee, wishing anonymity, said the party is going to file a case against Zahangir under section 21 of the Digital Security Act, 2018.



The section deals with punishment for making any kind of propaganda or campaign against the Liberation War, cognition of the Liberation War, the father of the nation, national anthem or national flag.

Zahangir was expelled from the AL after he spoke at a programme and made comments on Bangabandhu and the number of Liberation War martyrs in late September.

The party's central working committee made the decision after verifying Zahangir's video footage that went viral on social media.

"If any person, by means of digital medium, makes or instigates any propaganda or campaign against the Liberation War, cognition of the Liberation War, father of the nation, national anthem

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

KHALEDA'S TREATMENT

You can fly in expert doctors

Law minister tells BNP; party holds hunger strike nationwide

STAR REPORT

Amid repeated appeals for allowing the BNP chairperson to go abroad for better treatment, Law Minister Anisul Huq yesterday said the party could bring in expert doctors from abroad if it wanted.

The minister, however, reiterated that the government would not do anything regarding Khaleda Zia's treatment going beyond the law of the land.

Yesterday, the BNP observed a seven-hour mass hunger strike in the capital and elsewhere in the country demanding Khaleda be allowed to go abroad for improved treatment.

In the capital, hundreds of leaders and activists of the BNP and its associate bodies observed the hunger strike in front of the party's Nayapalton central office from 9:00am.

Khulna police foiled BNP's hunger strike in the city. In Patuakhali, at least eight people were injured in an attack allegedly by Chhatra League men on the opposition party's demonstration.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Zero Covid death for first time in 19 months

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh yesterday reported zero deaths from Covid-19 in a day for the first time since April 3 last year, raising optimism that the country has tamed the rogue virus that has claimed 27,946 lives and billions in losses to the economy.

However, public health experts are not rejoicing the statistic yet and urged for caution.

"It's not over until the virus is not controlled everywhere in the world -- many countries earlier witnessed zero deaths and cases only to see both jump again," said Mushtuq Hossain, consultant of the Institute of Epidemiology, Disease Control and Research.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

Pile pressure on Myanmar junta

Say experts after UN resolution by consensus

PORIMOL PALMA

Adoption of a resolution on the Rohingya by consensus at the UN has created momentum towards resolving the Rohingya crisis, and Dhaka now needs to amplify diplomatic efforts towards a sustainable Rohingya solution, said analysts.

They say the coronavirus pandemic, little actions by the UN Security Council since the Rohingya crisis in 2017 and the military coup in Myanmar early this year had thrown the Rohingya agenda into uncertainty.

Now that the UN has adopted the resolution by consensus against the previous instances where China, Russia, Japan or ASEAN members had abstained from voting, analysts think this creates political and moral pressure on Myanmar.

"I believe the pressure will be mounted on Myanmar as the resolution has been passed by consensus," Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen told reporters after paying tribute to Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman in Tungipara of Gopalganj yesterday.

The UN resolution strongly condemned the Myanmar military coup and the atrocities against the civilians and called for restoring democracy. It also called for addressing the root causes of the Rohingya crisis and other ethnic conflicts, implementation of the agreements between

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Bangladesh captain Mahmudullah Riyad trudges off the pitch after being dismissed for 12 in the second T20I against Pakistan at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday. The visitors won the match by eight wickets to take a 2-0 lead in the three-match series.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

US sees Bangladesh in a new light now

Says ambassador Kelly Keiderling during interview with The Daily Star

PORIMOL PALMA

Realising the growing importance of economy and security, the US is moving away from its old idea of Bangladesh and is looking to chart the next 50 years of relationship between the two countries in a new way, a top US official has said.

Ambassador Kelly Keiderling said traditionally Bangladesh was known as a garment manufacturer and a poor LDC. Now the US is has a modern idea of Bangladesh being a vibrant economy and a major contributor to world security in terms of UN peacekeeping.

"Bangladesh keeps watch on the international transnational crimes, along with



human and drug trafficking along the Indian Ocean rim. These are also elements of global security."

Keiderling, South and Central Asian affairs bureau deputy assistant secretary for public diplomacy and Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka, said Bangladesh is also providing software products to the international cyber world and it is important for the US to interact with Bangladesh on the topic.

"We are excited about our future relationship with Bangladesh," Keiderling told The Daily Star in an exclusive interview on Wednesday.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

Tigers meander to series defeat

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh's home dominance finally came to an end, with some poor cricket seeing them face a first T20I series defeat this year as Pakistan clinched the ongoing three-match series with a comprehensive eight-wicket win in the second game at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium in Mirpur yesterday.

Following yet another horrible batting display that saw Bangladesh post 108 for seven after electing to bat, Pakistan rode on a blistering fifty from Fakhar Zaman to get home with eleven balls to spare.

Despite losing skipper Babar Azam for 10 early on after he chopped a Mustafizur Rahman delivery onto his stumps, Pakistan had no problems whatsoever chasing the small target.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6

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