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SHAH CEMENT

Karnaphuli tunnel set for another delay

JAGARAN CHAKMA

The Karnaphuli tunnel, South Asia's first under-river tunnel, is set to be delayed by at least six more months.

The much-hyped Tk 10,374 crore project is scheduled for completion in December 2022.

But last month, Md Harunur Rashid Chowdhury, project director of the multilane road tunnel scheme, wrote to the Bangladesh Bridge Authority seeking additional six months to make up for the delayed start of construction and the procedural delays in payment to contractors.

The construction of the 9.39 kilometre-long underwater expressway tunnel, which is aimed at improving the Dhaka-Chattagram-Cox's Bazar highway network, began in December 2017 -- two years after the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council had approved the project at an estimated cost of Tk 8,446 crore.

"We are trying our level best to complete the project within the stipulated time," Chowdhury told The Daily Star over the phone.

Construction works of the tunnel, christened the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Tunnel, was disrupted because of the pandemic, he said. "But it is difficult to say as of this moment whether we would be able to."

As of October, 76 percent of the physical work for the project is complete.

If the physical work is complete in due time, additional time would be needed to complete the official formalities including making payment to contractors, Chowdhury said.

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Bangladesh Awami League brings out a colourful procession in the capital's Shahbag intersection yesterday to celebrate the 50 years of Bangladesh's independence. The procession, however, caused tailbacks in parts of the city.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

AL pledges to make country developed

Leaders vow at mammoth rally

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ruling Awami League leaders yesterday pledged that they would continue working together to make Bangladesh a prosperous and developed country by resisting the evil forces and foiling conspiracies.

Addressing a rally in front of the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) before bringing out a Victory Procession in the capital, they also alleged that evil, anti-liberation, and anti-democracy forces were still conspiring against the country.

The party brought out the mammoth procession marking the celebration of the Golden Jubilee of Bangladesh's victory in the Liberation War and the birth centenary of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman.

The colourful procession paraded through different

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Fertiliser plenty, yet prices high

ASIFUR RAHMAN and SUKANTA HALDER

Farmers in different districts are buying fertiliser at prices higher than those set by the government even though the authorities insist there is no crisis in the country.

As per the government-fixed rates, a 50 kg sack of Triple Super Phosphate (TSP) should sell for Tk 1,100, Diammonium Phosphate (DAP) for Tk 800 and Muriate of Potash (MOP) for Tk 750.

In reality, each sack of TSP is selling for Tk 1,400 to Tk 1,700, DAP between Tk 950 and Tk 1,050, and MOP for Tk 950-1,000, The Daily Star learnt after speaking with farmers in Dinajpur,

Kushtia, Chuadanga, Naogaon, Jhenaidah, Sirajganj and a few other districts recently.

The prices of the fertilisers, needed to prepare the soil beds for the cultivation of vegetables, were hiked despite adequate stock, according to officials, who said a section of unscrupulous dealers and retailers was charging extra under the pretence of hiked prices in the international market.

The current stock of TSP is 1.92 lakh tonnes against the demand for 1.14 lakh tonnes, according to agriculture ministry officials. The stock of DAP and MOP stood at 5.96 and 3.12 lakh tonnes against the demand for 2.88

and 1.29 lakh tonnes respectively.

The hiked prices come even though Agriculture Minister Muhammad Abdur Razzaque on November 30 had directed field-level officials to keep a close watch on the ground so that no one can sell fertiliser at prices higher than the government rates.

There is a sufficient supply of fertiliser in the country and that the government would not increase the prices even though those have almost tripled in the international market, he said.

Razzaque also instructed the officials to strengthen monitoring to ensure an adequate supply to farmers.

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Workers piling up sacks of fertiliser at Amin Bazar just outside the capital yesterday. Even though there seems to be plenty of stock, farmers in different districts are saying prices have gone up due to supply shortage.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

PRE-POLLS VIOLENCE

Masked men made gun attack that killed two

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Brahmanbaria

At least three to four criminals wearing facemasks made the gun attack that has left two people dead including the chairman candidate of the upcoming Union Parishad election in Brahmanbaria's Nabinagar upazila.

The dead are Badal Sarkar, 25, a resident of Nandura village, and Ershadul Haque, 35, a chairman candidate.

The attack took place around 10 pm on Friday when the two were returning from a religious gathering at the union's Kurighar Bazar area, according to their family and police.

Sarkar died on the spot, while Haque passed away around 1:45 am yesterday on the way to Dhaka Medical College Hospital.

Morgue sources said Sarkar had a bullet wound on his head while Haque had two bullet hits: one on his neck and one in the face.

"My son was not able to speak but he gestured to me that there were three to four attackers and they had covered their face with a mask," Haque's father Abul Kashem, also the incumbent chairman of

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Cryptic symbols found carved in Qatar's deserts



CNN ONLINE

Some shoot out of the soft rock like reptiles bathing in the sun. Others are mysterious depressions resembling an ancient board game played all over the world. And a few are straight-up puzzling.

On a desolate and windswept corner of Qatar's northeastern coast, among the sand dunes of the barren desert, lies Al Jassasiya, the Gulf country's largest and most important rock art site.

Here, people centuries ago used a series of low-lying limestone outcrops as a canvas on which they carved symbols, motifs and objects that they observed in their environment.

Overall, archaeologists have found a total of some 900 rock carvings, or "petroglyphs," at Al Jassasiya.

They are mostly enigmatic cup marks arranged in various patterns, including rows and rosettes, but also eye-catching representations of sailing ships, usually seen from above but also depicted in linear profile, among other symbols and signs.

"Although rock art is common in the Arabian Peninsula, some of the carvings in Al Jassasiya are unique and cannot be found anywhere else," Ferhan Sakal, head of excavation and site management at Qatar Museums, told CNN, referring to the petroglyphs of ships seen from a bird's-eye view.

"These carvings represent a high degree of

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10kg gold bars found in Biman flight

MOHAMMAD SUMAN, Ctg

Customs Intelligence and Investigation Directorate (CIID) yesterday recovered 86 gold bars weighing 10 kgs from underneath a passenger seat of a Biman flight from Dubai at the port city's Shah Amanat International Airport.

Acting on a tip-off, a CIID team carried out a drive in Biman Bangladesh Airlines flight BG-148 that touched down at around 9:30 am, said AKM Sultan Mahmood, deputy director of CIID.

The gold bars, which were worth about Tk 7 crore, were wrapped in scotch tape.

No arrest has been made in connection with the incident yet.

The gold bars would be deposited with the Bangladesh Bank, as per

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PRAYER TIMING DECEMBER 19

Fazr Zohr Asr Maghrib Esha
AZAN 5:20 12:45 3:45 5:22 7:00
JAMAAT 5:55 1:15 4:00 5:25 7:30

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

2 univ students die on roads



Mitu



Mohan

STAR REPORT

Two university students were killed in separate road accidents in Noakhali and Bogura yesterday.

In Noakhali, the dead was identified as Sabrina Akhtar Mitu, 22, a third year student of the journalism and mass communication department of Jagannath university.

The accident occurred when a recklessly driven brick-laden truck hit Mitu on the Sonaimuri-Cumilla regional

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Omicron cases doubling in 1.5 to 3 days

Says WHO; British researchers say 'no evidence' variant milder than Delta

AGENCIES

The Omicron variant of the coronavirus is spreading significantly faster than the Delta strain in countries with documented community transmission, with the number of cases doubling in 1.5 to 3 days, the World Health Organization (WHO) has said.

In an update yesterday, the United Nations' health agency said Omicron has been reported in 89 countries.

The highly mutated variant is spreading rapidly in countries with high levels of population immunity, the WHO said, but it is unclear if this is due to the virus' ability to evade immunity, its inherent increased transmissibility or a combination of both.

The agency designated Omicron a

variant of concern on November 26, soon after it was first detected by scientists in South Africa, and much is still not known about it. Scientists remain uncertain how dangerous it is, but early data suggests it can be more resistant to vaccines and more transmissible than the Delta variant.

"There are still limited data on the clinical severity of Omicron," the WHO said in its update. "More data are needed to understand the severity profile and how severity is impacted by vaccination and pre-existing immunity."

It added, "There are still limited available data, and no peer-reviewed evidence, on vaccine efficacy or effectiveness to date for Omicron."

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We are Mourning

Industrialist Md. M. Jalal Uddin Chowdhury, Managing Director of Clifton Group (A Garment Manufacturing Industry) has passed away on Friday at 7:42pm BDT on 17th of December 2021 at Samitevej Hospital in Bangkok, Thailand (Inna Lillahi Wa Inna Ilaihi Rajeeon). We mourn this immense loss with profound sadness and prayers. May Allah (SWT) forgive and grant him Jannatul Ferdous. Please pray for the departed soul.

Born on 1st of January 1939 in Chittagong, Mirersharai, Bangladesh; he was 82 years old at the time of his death. He is survived by his two sons and four daughters with countless well-wishers and admirers.

CLIFTON GROUP

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