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Shakib Khan on recent film actors' polls



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Amnesty says Israel enforcing 'apartheid'



P10 Wait, it's made of mud?
Mud-made post office in operation for 40yrs



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Production and export hampered as orders soar

People in for higher living expenses

Govt looks to raise electricity, gas, fertiliser prices by March to ease subsidy pressure

SUBSIDY: BUDGET 2021-22

SECTOR	ORIGINAL ALLOCATION	REVISED DEMAND
Power	Tk 9,000cr	Tk 25,000cr
LNG	Tk 6,000cr	Tk 32,000cr
Agriculture	Tk 9,000cr	Tk 28,000cr

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and WASIM BIN HABIB

People can brace themselves for yet another round of living expense hike as the government is mulling over raising the prices of electricity, gas and fertiliser by March to bring its subsidy burden down to a tolerable limit.

The prices of electricity and gas could see a rise as early as this month and by March would come the hike in the prices of fertiliser -- whose knock-on effect would be costlier fruits, vegetables and grains -- according to finance ministry officials working on the matter.

However, there is a tug of war going on between the optics-minded and number-crunching officials over the choice to hike the prices of gas and fertiliser at this moment.

A section of the officials believes that an increase in the prices of the key items a year before the national parliamentary election would harm the government.

But the other officials deem a price adjustment is necessary now to prevent the subsidies for electricity and gas from heading towards the unreasonable territory.

The bid to hike the electricity and gas tariffs and fertiliser prices comes two months into the kerosene and diesel price hikes that went on to raise the living expenses for the poor and the middle-class still reeling from the blow dealt by the pandemic.

If the new proposals are approved, it would increase the production costs and fuel inflation further.

In December last year, inflation hit 6.05 percent, the highest in 14 months and overshooting the government's target of 5.30 percent for this fiscal year.

Food inflation was the highest in six months, while non-food inflation came close to the high of 7.05 percent seen in December 2015. It touched 7 percent in December last year.

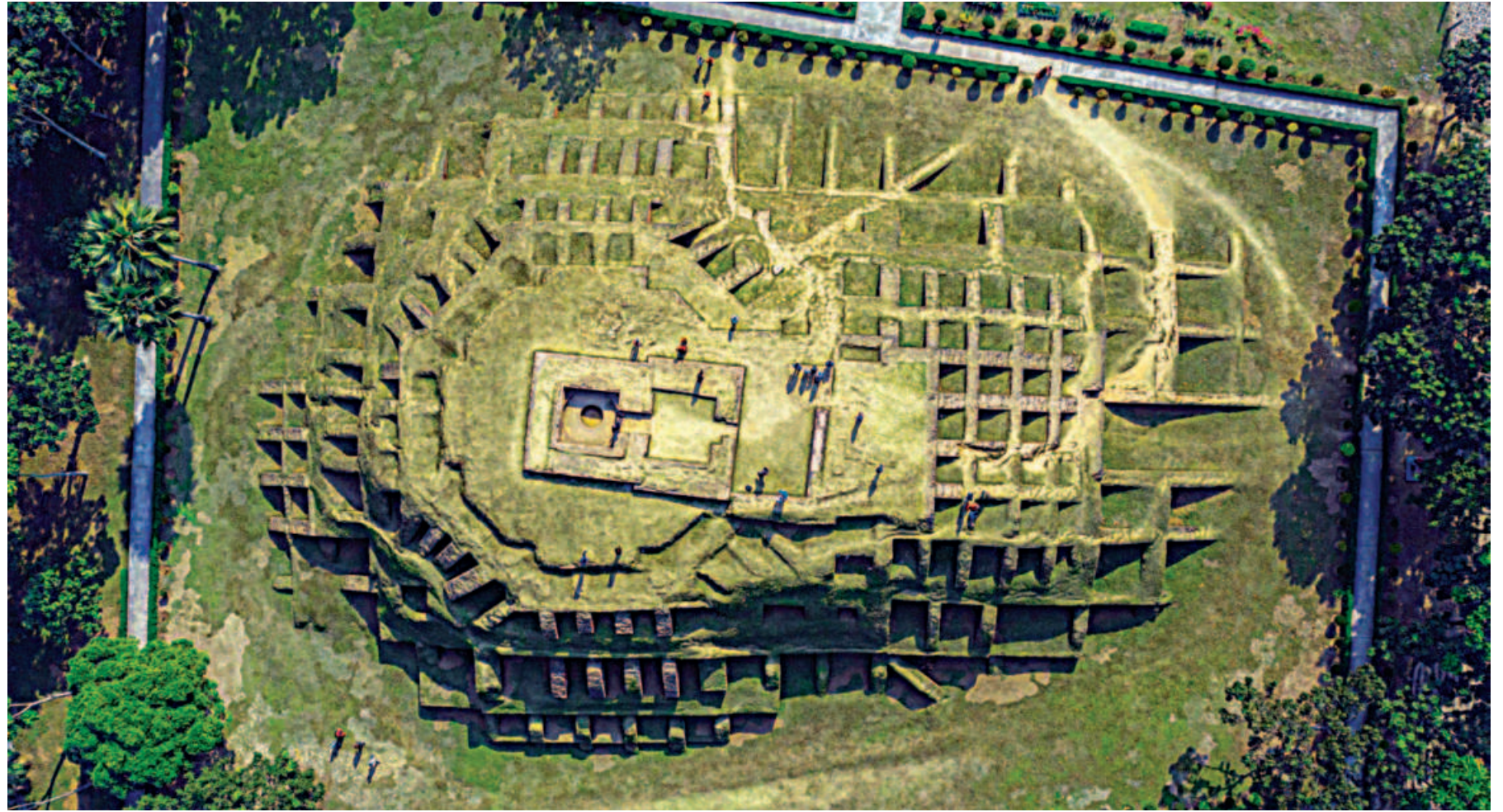
"The increase in prices would be slight but, on the upside, the government's subsidy burden will become bearable," said a top finance ministry official asking not to be named to speak candidly on the issue.

Besides, hiking the prices will help ensure funds for urgent health emergencies like procuring additional Covid-19 vaccines and booster shots.

The government may require additional money to tackle adverse situations should any new variant of Covid-19 crop up.

"We are witnessing a surge in the number of Covid patients due to the Omicron variant. If any new wave hits the country this year too, the government will have to spend additional money for food distribution programmes."

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An aerial view of Behular Basor Ghor, an archaeological site first dug up in Bogura's Gokul village in 1934-36. Excavations uncovered the foundation of a huge Buddhist temple built in the sixth/seventh centuries AD. Later, another temple was built on the ruins of the former. It is popularly known as the abode of Behula-Lakshminder, protagonists of a popular folklore of the region. The number of visitors to this site, around 3km south of Mahasthangarh -- ruins of the ancient capital of Pundravardhana -- has dropped significantly since the pandemic hit the country in March 2020. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUI

I felt I was demanding justice for all 'crossfire' victims

Slain Major (ret'd) Sinha's sister tells *The Daily Star*

ZYMA ISLAM

The verdict in the Major (ret'd) Sinha murder case was not just a victory for his family, but for all the families who have lost their loved ones to "crossfires" in the hands of Teknaf police.

Sinha's elder sister Sharmin Shahria Ferdush said this while talking to *The Daily Star* yesterday.

"Every time I was in court, families of other victims would be there. I was demanding justice for my brother but every time I felt I was fighting for them too... They are so vulnerable, so marginalised."

"I understood them and they understood me. They too lost a

brother, a father or a son. If I am victorious, they will be too." She said it is unacceptable how extrajudicial killings are passed off as "crossfires".



"...To deal with the ultimate evil, you have to be the ultimate good."

"If the person is guilty then make him face the court. The court must decide the crime, not an individual."

"It would have been easier to have Pradeep and Liaqat get 'crossfired', but I did not want the easy way out. My strength was honesty. To deal with the ultimate

evil, you have to be the ultimate good," Sharmin said.

Officer-in-charge Pradeep Kumar Das was the former head of Teknaf police and the one who ordered Sinha's murder, while Inspector Liaqat Ali, who headed Baharchhara investigation centre, shot the fatal bullets.

She went on to say that in spite of the facts, they were unsure till the last moment whether Pradeep would be handed capital punishment.

"Sinha lived with a purpose and died with a purpose. Perhaps that purpose was to give the people of Teknaf the justice they deserved."

His family had been pursuing a campaign demanding justice for Sinha and one of the social media hashtags they used was #stopextrajudicialkilling.

RELATED STORY ON PAGE 2

RT-PCR prices too high here

Global drop in costs of test kits bears no reflection

MOUDDUD AHMED SUJAN

Despite a gradual decline in the prices of RT-PCR testing kits in the market, the government has not lowered the cost of the Covid tests at private hospitals and labs since May 2021.

The high cost is also thwarting the efforts to increase testing at a time when the Omicron variant of coronavirus is causing the number of new cases to soar, said experts.

In 2020, a PCR test kit cost between Tk 2,000 and 3,000. But each kit now costs between Tk 145 and 950. Taking into account the operational costs, officials at different private labs said they would still make a profit if they charged Tk 1,500 for each test.

But most of the private health facilities currently charge at least Tk 3,000 for a PCR test, while the rate is Tk 2,500 for those about to travel abroad.

"I had Covid symptoms last week. But I did not get tested due to the high cost of tests at private labs. I didn't go to the government facilities because of the long queues," said Iqbal Hossain, manager of an apartment building in Tejuri Bazar area.

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Khaleda back home after 80 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia returned home last night after undergoing treatment at the capital's Evercare Hospital for 80 days.

Khaleda's younger brother Shamim Iskander, his wife Kanij Fatema, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir, senior leaders Amanullah Aman, Abdus Salam and some other relatives welcomed her to her Gulshan residence at 8:30pm.

Several hundred party leaders and activists also gathered outside the house to greet Khaleda. She

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A truck in flames on Rajshahi University campus last night after students set it ablaze protesting the death of a fellow student under the wheels of a truck only a few yards away. The demonstrating students also blocked the Dhaka-Rajshahi highway in Kajla Gate area.

PHOTO: STAR

Truck kills RU student on campus

Students burst into protests, urge VC to ensure safety

ARAFAT RAHAMAN

A Rajshahi University student was crushed to death and another injured under the wheels of a construction truck on the campus last night.

The incident occurred near the university's Habibur Rahman Hall around 8:45pm, when the two students were passing by on a motorcycle.

Mahmud Habib Himel, the deceased, was a fourth-year student of graphic design, crafts and history of the university's arts department, said Prof Pradip Kumar Pandey, RU's public relations officer.

Himel, hailing from Natore, was also the general secretary of the RU Drama Association.

The authorities had to struggle to recover his body as angry, protesting students were surrounding it.

Anwar Ali, officer-in-charge of Motihar Police Station, said police were able to recover the body at 10:00pm, an hour and 15 minutes after the incident, and sent it to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital for autopsy.

The injured, Rimel, a fourth-year student of ceramics and sculpture department, was taken to RMCH for treatment by protesting students.

The truck, bound for a nearby construction site, hit the motorcycle and then crushed Himel's head, said witnesses, RU teachers and police.

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