



Eminent citizens during a meeting with the search committee for appointments of the chief election commissioner and four election commissioners at the Supreme Court Judges Lounge in the capital yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

Sust students call off movement VC apologises

OUR CORRESPONDENT, SYLHET

Following the assurance of the education minister, protesting students of the Shahjalal University of Science and Technology suspended their oust-VC movement yesterday.

Their spokesperson Mohaiminul Bashar Raj informed the media about their decision around 8:00pm yesterday.

He made the declaration after a meeting with the protesting students on the campus.

"We are suspending the movement believing in the assurance given by the minister and deputy minister of the education ministry. And we will be waiting for our demands to be met as per the assurance," he said.

He also urged the students to resume classes and sit for exams which had been suspended on January 16 night.

Meanwhile, Sust Vice-Chancellor Prof Farid Uddin Ahmed officially apologised yesterday for the incidents that took place on campus on January 16.

In a statement, he said, "I express my sincere sympathy and condolences to all those who have been injured in the unfortunate incident at our beloved university, including teachers, students, and staffers."

"As the supreme guardian of the university, I am deeply sorry for the untoward incidents. I would like to express my gratitude to the faculties, students,

SEE PAGE 8 COL 1

IMMINENT WAR FEARS IN UKRAINE

Biden, Putin set for talks

Countries tell citizens to leave Ukraine; Lavrov, in Blinken call, slams US 'propaganda'

AGENCIES

Russian President Vladimir Putin is set to speak with his US and French counterparts yesterday after the United States warned that Moscow could invade Ukraine in days.

The United States had dramatically raised the alarm over Ukraine on Friday, saying a Russian invasion starting with civilians caught under aerial bombing could begin in days and telling US citizens to leave within 48 hours.

In a diplomatic flurry to head off a possible invasion, Putin was scheduled to speak with Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron later yesterday.

Two calls in December between Biden and Putin produced no breakthroughs but set the stage for diplomacy between their aides. The two leaders have not spoken since, and diplomats from both sides have struggled to find common ground.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken also talked with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov yesterday.

During a call between Washington and Moscow's top diplomats yesterday, "the secretary made clear that a diplomatic path to resolving the crisis remained open, but it would require Moscow to deescalate and engage in good faith discussions," State Department spokesman Ned

Price said in a statement.

Weeks of tensions that have seen Russia surround its western neighbor with more than 100,000 troops revved up another notch when the Kremlin launched its biggest naval drills in years across the Black Sea.

Moscow has repeatedly disputed Washington's version of events, saying it has massed the troops near the Ukrainian border to maintain its own security against aggression by NATO allies.

According to Russia, Lavrov accused the United States during the call of seeking to provoke conflict in Ukraine.

"The propaganda campaign unleashed by the United States and its allies concerning 'Russian aggression' against Ukraine pursues provocative goals," Lavrov said, according to the Russian foreign ministry.

Earlier Saturday the United States ordered all non-emergency Kyiv embassy staff to leave Ukraine because of the threat of invasion. Australia, New Zealand, Germany and the Netherlands yesterday joined countries urging their citizens to Ukraine.

Russia meanwhile said it had decided to "optimise" its diplomatic staff numbers in Ukraine, fearing "provocations" by Kyiv or another party.

On Friday, White House National

Security Advisor Jake Sullivan called on Americans to immediately leave Ukraine, warning a Russian attack "is likely to begin with aerial bombing and missile attacks that could obviously kill civilians."

While stressing that it was not yet known whether Putin had taken a decision, saying "we can't predict the exact determination," Sullivan made clear the United States was bracing for the worst, including a "rapid assault" on the capital Kyiv.

Sullivan spoke shortly after President Joe Biden and six European leaders, the heads of NATO and the European Union held talks on the worst crisis between the West and Russia since the end of the Cold War.

The Pentagon on Friday announced it was sending 3,000 more troops to bolster Poland.

Russian naval forces and troops, including units brought in from all over the vast country, now surround Ukraine to the south, east and north.

The Kremlin says its goal is to get NATO to agree to never give Ukraine membership and also to withdraw from eastern European countries already in the alliance, effectively carving Europe into Cold War style spheres of influence. The United States and its European allies reject the demands, insisting that NATO poses no threat to Russia.

THANK YOU

FROM PAGE 1

As all of you are fully aware that for the print media the last two years were most trying. We have had a devastating setback in both circulation and revenue.

However, thanks to a set of dedicated journalists and other members constituting The Daily Star Team, we were able to weather the storm but only just. I have no hesitation in declaring that without the continuous and determined support of our readers and advertisers, this would not have been possible. Please accept our profound gratitude and thanks.

The pandemic story is not only one of disaster but also one of huge opportunity. Fundamental changes have occurred in most of the important sectors of the society. The same is true for the media. The digitalisation process has been pushed forward exponentially and journalism itself has had to reinvent itself in some fundamental ways. New digital formats demanded new types of content for which journalists had to undergo retraining in terms of skills and thinking process. There is also the new world of instant newsfeed in which readers and viewers want to know everything instantly. Thus,

the competition among the media to beat one another in taking news and views to their readers and viewers – a practice that was always there but now has to be done within a much shorter span of time – poses a new challenge: how to be quick and yet live up to all the standards of good journalism.

But while so much has changed, some things have remained the same: need for credible, impartial and courageous journalism. As Bangladesh moves towards being a developing country, our journalism also has to move towards higher professionalism. We need to serve our readers with more investigative stories, more in-depth coverage of events, more stories on our march forward as well as on those who are left behind. We have to defend the basic human rights of all our citizens and pay particular attention for the protection and advancement of our disadvantaged people. For this, we need to train our five-part supplement, which is dedicated to building the future Bangladesh.

We strongly believe that Bangladesh's economic growth will inevitably lead to our advancement in

education, science, culture, the arts, etc. We believe that people's standard of living will rise and with it our expectation from our institutions, especially our government and the elected leadership. For all this to happen, our democracy must become institutionalised with an in-built accountability system and a legitimate and open space for dissent.

To build such a future we, in The Daily Star, pledge journalism of the future that will promote democracy, people's rights, economic prosperity and equality among our citizens.

education, science, culture, the arts, etc. We believe that people's standard of living will rise and with it our expectation from our institutions, especially our government and the elected leadership. For all this to happen, our democracy must become institutionalised with an in-built accountability system and a legitimate and open space for dissent.

We hope you will enjoy our five-part supplement, which is dedicated to building the future Bangladesh.

We thank again our readers and advertisers and hope to enjoy their support and goodwill in the coming years as we have done in the past. Stay safe and stay healthy.

— Mahfuz Anam, editor and publisher

Neck-deep in maladies

FROM PAGE 1

reaching 7 percent in December, a six-year high. While the increased fuel prices are draining people's pockets further, there are talks of further increasing utility costs for households. Experts warn that these increased prices will eventually affect the market of daily essentials and will take a toll on the middle-income people.

A gourd used to cost Tk 50 in winter a couple of years ago. Now it is Tk 80-90. A bundle of spinach used to cost less than Tk

10, now it is over Tk 15," said Habibullah Bahar, a resident of Shantinagar in the capital.

At several kitchen markets in the capital, these correspondents found that the average prices of pumpkin, cauliflower, cabbage, papaya, green bean, gourd, cucumber, brinjal, radish, carrot, tomato and pea have risen by 61.6 percent from the prices mentioned by the Department of Agriculture Marketing in 2019.

Rising fuel prices have made shipping more expensive and this affected the kitchen markets.

A litre of soybean oil used to cost Tk 88 in 2019. The price has almost doubled with increases in multiple phases.

Each kg of beef and mutton now sells for Tk 600 and Tk 900 respectively, up from Tk 550 and Tk 750 two years ago.

Pangas, ruhi, tilapia fish and shrimps have also become costlier.

Despite bumper harvest of paddy, rice is costlier too.

Between 2020 and 2022, the price of coarse and fine

rice

Boro rice has increased to Tk 45 and Tk 65 from Tk 34 and Tk 54. The price of flour has also increased by Tk 10 per kg to Tk 43.

Contacted, former director general of the Department of Agriculture Marketing (DAM) Mohammad Yusuf said the actual rice production was lower than the government estimation. "Many big companies are now selling packs of rice. To be able to do this, they store rice, contributing to the rise in prices."

He added that the demand for rice has

gone up more than the production has increased over the years, he said, adding that that's why the price does not fall.

Noted economist Ahsan HMansur, executive director at the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said at first, there was a price hike of commodities in the global market. As a result, consumer goods became costlier.

Amid rising cost of living, rents go up and employees ask for raises. This eventually raises the cost of production, he said.

Make names public

FROM PAGE 1

Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam said the search panel received a total of 329 names. Of them, 136 names were proposed by political parties, 40 by professional bodies, and 34 by individuals.

After its formation on February 5, the committee held its first meeting the following day and sought names for the EC appointments.

The panel also invited some 60 eminent citizens of the country for their suggestions and proposals on the appointments.

Twenty-five of them participated in the meetings yesterday. The committee will meet other eminent personalities at 4:00pm today at the same venue.

The tenure of the current EC, led by CEC KM Nurul Huda, expires tomorrow.

During the meetings yesterday, the invitees told the panel it should disclose the names of its nominees

before forwarding them to the president. Making the names public will allow general people to give their feedback and it will ensure transparency in the entire process, they said.

Former cabinet secretary Ali Imam Majumder said they suggested the panel not to nominate anyone who took any sort of benefit from any government.

"Many supported this suggestion."

Dhaka University's Prof Asif Nazrul said, "We have emphasised on the do's and don'ts of the selection process."

"Those who received unfair benefits and 'extra facilities', got undue promotions and contractual appointments under any government should be considered to be loyal to certain parties. So, they should be considered ineligible for the [EC] appointments."

He said those openly siding with a political party

should also be excluded from the list of the panel's nominees.

"If the names chosen by the search committee are made public, people will be able to raise objections against any candidate, if they have any."

Ensuring transparency in the process will help form a strong and neutral EC, he also said.

Prof Mahfuza Khanam, president of Asiatic Society of Bangladesh, said the nominees should be honest and pro-liberation.

Prof ASM Maksud Kamal, Dhaka University's pro-VC (academic), said they proposed that the committee forward a shortlist of 20 people to the president, instead of 10.

Munira Khan, president of the Fair Election Monitoring Alliance, suggested there be more than one female member in the EC.

Zafnullah also said he proposed names for EC appointments and that all the names submitted in this regard should be published in the media.

Samakal Publisher AK Azad, president of the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh, said they suggested the panel nominate those whose credibility was never questioned.

"All the names received by the search committee should be published in the media. The 10 names to be forwarded to the president should also be made public. They [search committee] assured us either of the two lists of the names will be disclosed."

Haas looks forward to working with Dhaka

BSS, Dhaka

The newly-appointed US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter D Haas has said he looks forward to working with Dhaka to further advance the relationship between the two countries, he said at an interaction session with the officers of the Bangladesh Embassy in Washington DC on Friday.

Haas is expected to arrive in Dhaka in early March to assume charges.

The new envoy was received by Bangladesh Ambassador to the US Shahidul Islam.

Earlier, Ambassador Haas placed a floral wreath at the bust of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman on the embassy premises.

Oxygen cylinder bursts in ambulance, 3 hurt

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bagerhat

An oxygen cylinder exploded in an ambulance in Bagerhat's Sharankhola upazila, injuring three people, on Friday night.

They were identified as Mamun, the ambulance driver, and his assistants Milon and Shimul, said Sadiur Rahman, OC of Sharankhola police.

They were rescued and taken to Sharankhola Upazila Health Complex and later shifted to Khulna Medical College Hospital.

Mamun said, "I was carrying an oxygen cylinder in the ambulance for a patient suffering from respiratory issues in Rayenda Bazar of Rayenda ghat area. The cylinder exploded by unloading."

Locals kill rare palm civet

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Moulvibazar

Locals killed a rare palm civet that entered a locality in Habiganj's Chunarrughat upazila yesterday afternoon.

When the animal made its way into Saddam bazar area from the forest, people panicked and beat it to death, said Mazharul Islam, of Moulvibazar's wildlife management and nature conservation department.

Abdur Razzaq Raju, a Chunarrughat-based journalist, said, "This environmentally friendly animal should not have been killed and the forest department should conduct awareness campaigns in this regard."

Man hurt in post-polls violence dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

A man died yesterday after being attacked by a member candidate of the UP election to Rajanagar union of Chattogram's Rangunia upazila and his supporters on February 2.

Yousuf Ali, the deceased, was the brother of the union's elected member Abu Tayeb, said Mahabub Milki, OC of Rangunia police.

His family alleged that Tayab's rival candidate Azgar Ali and his supporters attacked Yousuf while he was on the road.

After Yousuf's wife filed a case, two people, Md Mamun and Abu Bakar, were arrested and sent to jail.

The full versions of the stories can be found under the same headlines on www.thedailystar.net

Schools may reopen

FROM PAGE 16
up child vaccination
countrywide.

As of Thursday, a total of 1.44 crore government-run school and madrasa children, out of about 1.50 crore and 4,418 Qawmi madrasa students received

the first dose. Of them, around 40 lakh received the second dose.

To protect the children aged between 12 and 17, the government started child vaccination on November 1 last year.