



B1

Electricity for all
100pc population comes under coverage



P6

Unique export
Banana fibre showing promises



P7

Ukraine crisis
Europe's arms imports jump: SIPRI



P11

One-day battle
Dhaka Premier League (DPL) begins today

ECOMMERCE SCAM VICTIMS

Majority would never get their money back

ZYMA ISLAM

In the history of Ponzi schemes, there is no example of equitable justice. There is only one outcome: the house of cards comes crashing down, the mastermind is hauled off to jail, and the victims are the ones hung out to dry.

Ponzi scheme is an investment fraud that pays existing investors with funds collected from new investors.

Amidst the flurry of frantic activities by the authorities, insiders have long ago resigned to the grim realisation that the victims can only be offered table scraps.

Take eorange as an example. As many as 5,573 complaints were filed against the ecommerce platform with the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection (DNCRP), but with no money in sight, only 33 complaints could be disposed of so far.

The amount of money over which the complaints were filed is not small by any means. DNCRP's log shows that 10 of the worst eorange victims who sought help are owed a total of Tk 48.36 crores.

They are all buyers, and only 10 of the several thousands who are looking to the directorate for answers.

Information provided by insiders at the commerce ministry reveals that the company has roughly Tk 44 crores stuck in payment gateways, meaning that is the maximum that can be returned and disbursed — not even enough to pay the 10 buyers.

Since July 1 last year, the gateways have been keeping such payments in the escrow accounts as per a directive of Bangladesh Bank, and waiting for confirmation from the merchants about the delivery of the products, according to the ministry information.

Escrow is the use of a third party, which holds an asset or funds before they are transferred from one party to another. The third party holds the funds until both parties have fulfilled their contractual requirements.

With eorange owner Sonia Mehzabin and the chief operating officer Masukur Rahman in jail over a Tk 1,100-crore lawsuit, and emptied-out bank accounts, there is apparently no real way, at least for now, to dispose of all the complaints filed by the platform's customers and merchants.

According to the relevant law, when any consumer files a complaint with the directorate, it can take two steps — it can either mediate an arbitration between the seller and the consumer for an amicable solution, or it can impose a fine of up to Tk 50,000 on the seller, of which the consumer receives a quarter.

Ecommerce consumers buying high-value products, including electronic items and vehicles, choose arbitration, since with fines they can only get a refund of Tk 12,500.

But with ecommerce firms running on empty, the rights protection body is now facing an impossible challenge of realising money that simply does not exist.

There are 6,241 complaints against Evaly pending with the directorate since 2019. Data shows until June 2021, the disposal rate was 76 percent. The directorate's disposal rate was a solid 100 percent throughout 2019 and 2020.

But then the stack came tumbling down and the disposals came to a stalemate. The ecommerce company allegedly has liabilities of at least a thousand crores, of which around Tk 408 crore is to merchants.

According to commerce ministry data, the company has only Tk 28

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

**WORLD
CONSUMER
RIGHTS
DAY**



Holding his guitar, 18-year-old Maksim Korobych stands in front of a destroyed apartment building after it was shelled in the northwestern Obolon district of Kyiv yesterday. Two people were killed as various neighbourhoods of the Ukraine capital came under shelling and missile attacks.

PHOTO: AFP

Watch what you eat and drink

MOUDUD AHMMED SUJAN

The majority of the ready-to-consume snacks and beverages like fizzy drinks, chips and fried chicken contain substances harmful for health and are responsible for non-communicable diseases, found local researchers.

In Bangladesh, non-communicable diseases account for 67 percent of total deaths, according to the World Health Organisation.

The top-selling fizzy drinks in Bangladesh were found to contain heavy metals such as lead and chromium at a higher level than the allowable limit recommended by the WHO, found researchers of the Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University (BSMMU).

The study involved testing the top 10 soft drinks and five energy drinks in the country in terms of sales. The report did not disclose the brands tested.

The maximum allowable limit for lead in a day is 0.01 milligrams per litre (mg/L) and for chromium 0.05 mg/L.



But the median level of lead in the soft drinks was 0.21 mg/L and in the energy drinks 0.19 mg/L. The median level of chromium in soft drinks and energy drinks was 0.13 mg/L.

The majority of the fizzy drinks had extremely erosive pH for dental health, the study found.

A pH level lower than 3 is damaging for teeth and the soft drinks' pH was found to be 2.8 and the energy drinks' 2.9.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 4

Airstrikes, shells hit Kyiv, Mariupol

Kremlin says Russia may take 'full control' of big Ukrainian cities; peace talks go ahead

AGENCIES

Russia continued its bombardment of Ukrainian cities, with two people killed in airstrikes on a block of flats in the capital Kyiv yesterday, as the Kremlin said it may still opt to take control of large cities.

Ukrainian Deputy Prime Minister Iryna Vereshchuk said shelling by Russian forces was preventing the delivery of humanitarian aid to the Black Sea port city of Mariupol.

A convoy of at least 160 cars left Mariupol yesterday in the first successful attempt to arrange a humanitarian corridor out of the encircled Ukrainian city after over a week of trying.

Firefighters tackled the remains of a blaze at the damaged apartment block in the capital, where a stunned resident described the chaos of the previous night in a city targeted by the Russian advance but so far largely spared bombardment.

"The staircase was not there anymore, everything was on fire," Maksim Korovii told Reuters.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6

Tigresses' watershed moment

They notch maiden 50-over WC win beating Pakistan

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh women's cricket team immortalised their maiden 50-over ICC World Cup appearance by overcoming Pakistan in a nine-run nail-biter as the Tigresses registered their inaugural win of the mega event in Hamilton yesterday.

Many are, therefore, comparing the women's latest success in New Zealand to the men's triumph over their Pakistani counterparts in their maiden World Cup appearance back in 1999.

Nigar Sultana Joty and her troops displayed stellar character despite being under tremendous and sustained pressure in defending a target of 235 runs. In the end, the women in red and green devised a spectacular



Bangladesh's Rumana Ahmed high-fives Fahima Khatun (L) during their nine-run victory over Pakistan in the Women's World Cup in Hamilton yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

EDIBLE OIL PRICES

Just a little relief

Govt cuts VAT; Argentina stopping export of crude soybean could negate break

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Amid public outcry over the spiralling prices of edible oils, the government yesterday partially removed VAT on refined palm and soybean oil, but it is not likely to greatly ease the consumers' burden.

Fifteen percent VAT at the production stage and five percent at the retail level will be removed with immediate effect till June 30, said the National Board of Revenue in a notification.

However, customers are likely to get only marginal benefit as the 15 percent VAT on imports of crude palm and soybean oil remains.

Top officials of two major cooking oil importers and processors of the country said without the removal of VAT at import stage to go with waivers at production and retail levels, consumers already paying highest-ever prices for edible oil would pay just Tk 1.5-Tk 3 less per litre.

Currently, consumers pay Tk 26-Tk 30 VAT per litre of bottled soybean oil at the government-fixed price of Tk 168 per litre, refiners said.

Moreover, the decision of Argentina — Bangladesh's main source of crude soybean oil — to halt registration of export sales of soybean meal and oil yesterday could erode consumers' gains from the government's step.

"This will help consumers save to some extent ... they will get benefit once refiners reduce prices and mention maximum retail prices on bottles following the VAT

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1