

# KSA keen on pumping \$10b in 15 projects here

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and JAMIL MAHMUD

Saudi Arabia has shown interest in investing more than \$10 billion in 15 large- and small- scale projects in Bangladesh. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud is expected to discuss the projects on his two-day visit to Dhaka starting today.

Saudi Arabian Oil Company, popularly known as Aramco, has shown interest in the construction, operation and maintenance of an oil refinery, which is expected to cost between \$1.5 billion and \$2 billion.

But it is the Saudi company Engineering Dimension II LLC that appears to be gung- ho on Bangladesh: it is keen on investing in seven projects and has committed to channel in about \$1.685 billion during the International Investment Summit held in Dhaka in November last year.

Engineering Dimension is one of the parties that have shown interest in the construction of the Dhaka East- West Elevated Expressway, said Sirazul Islam, executive chairman of the Bangladesh Investment Development Authority.

Some Saudi investments are already in the pipeline such as the flagship proposal to develop the Patenga Container Terminal under a public- private partnership by Red Sea Gateway Terminal.

“Further Saudi investment will largely depend on how successfully we can handle those in the pipeline,” he told The Daily Star over the phone yesterday.

Boeing- accredited Al Salam has proposed to invest \$1.2 billion to establish an aerospace industrial area, while internationally reputed energy company ACWA Power, which has close business ties with Aramco, has submitted an expression of interest to invest about \$600 million to build a 730 MW combined cycle power plant in Chattogram.

Al- Hokair Group, a renowned hospitality company that owns 45 hotels, resorts and theme parks, wants to invest about \$300- \$500 million to develop Bangladesh’s tourism.

Al- Fanar wants to invest \$100 million in the construction of a 100 MW IPP solar project under a joint venture, while Al Bawany wants to invest about \$10 million in the employment of skilled human resources for construction and engineering project.

Ma’aden and Hanwha has proposed a revised letter of intent for the supply of di- ammonium phosphate (DAP) to Bangladesh after the existing one with the Bangladesh Chemical Industries Corporation (BCIC) expired in October 2020.

One aspect of Saudi investment is that it is “more inclined to the public sector”, Islam said.



Friends and relatives try to calm Golam Maola Prince after the body of his brother Hadisur Rahman arrived at the Dhaka airport yesterday. Hadisur, a third engineer, was killed in a “missile attack” on Bangladeshi ship Banglar Samriddhi at a Ukrainian port on March 2.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

# Pre- primary students’ very first day at school today

Full- fledged in- person classes also begin for secondary students

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

Secondary schools are set to resume full- fledged in- person classes today – two years after the Covid- 19- induced closures, online classes and limited scale operations.

Pre- primary classes at primary schools and kindergartens will also resume today, with the attendance of many first- time students.

Authorities of many secondary schools, however, said it will be challenging to keep students three feet apart in classrooms, as the number of students compared to classrooms is too big.

Education Minister Dipu Moni on Saturday announced the resumption of in- person classes on all subjects in secondary and higher secondary schools from March 15.

“From tomorrow [today], all secondary schools and colleges will start classes in full- swing like they did prior to the pandemic,” Prof Nehal Ahmed, director general of the Directorate of Secondary and Higher Education, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said they are starting in- person

classes as 98 percent of the students from classes six to 12 have received the first shot of Covid- 19 vaccines, while about 86 percent of them received the second. Another reason, he added, for schools to start classes was the declining Covid- 19 positivity rate.

There are 1.28 crore students in classes six to 12 in around 20,850 schools.

On March 17, 2020, all educational institutions were shut down due to the pandemic. They reopened partially on September 12 last year, after one of the longest school closures – 543 days – in the world.

The government again shut down schools and colleges from January 21 for two weeks after a sharp rise in the virus’s transmission rate. The closure was later extended till February 21.

Classes resumed partially at secondary on February 22, and primary school classes on March 2.

With the resumption of pre- primary classes today, students who had enrolled in schools in 2021 and this year will experience in- person classes for the first time.

Contacted, Zakir Hossen, minister for primary and mass education, yesterday said that a decision regarding full- fledged classes for all grades in primary schools will be taken soon.

ANM Shamsul Alam Khan, principal of Willes Little Flower School and College, and Abu Sayeed Bhuiyan, headmaster of Government Laboratory High School, said they will face challenges to ensure social distancing among students as the number of classrooms is smaller than that of students.

“With a distance of three feet among students, we can accommodate only 36 of them in each classroom, while have around 8,500 students overall...,” Shamsul said.

Both of them said wearing masks at schools will remain mandatory and all students will need to wash their hands while entering campus while maintaining social distancing.

Asked, Nehal said schools can take a day or two to prepare their routines, if needed, and split each class into batches to ensure social distancing inside classrooms.

# Sailor Hadisur’s burial today

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

The body of Hadisur Rahman Arif, a naval engineer killed in a “missile attack” on the Bangladeshi ship Banglar Samriddhi in Ukraine on March 2, reached his Barguna home by an ambulance from Dhaka last night.

The body arrived at the capital’s Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport at 12:20pm on a Turkish Airlines flight, Hadisur’s uncle Maksudur Rahman, chairman of Betagi Upazila Parishad, told The Daily Star.

Hadisur, 32, will be buried at his family graveyard in Betagi today morning.

# No online railway ticketing for 5 days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Railway’s online ticketing will remain suspended for five days from the early hours of March 21 to facilitate smooth handover of the ticketing job to a new vendor.

During these five days, 100 percent tickets will be sold from railway station counters manually, Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan said at a press conference at the capital’s Rail Bhavan yesterday.

Advance ticket would be issued two days beforehand instead of five days and there would be no quota during the five- day period, he said.

# Ananta murder case verdict on March 30

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

A Sylhet court yesterday fixed March 30 for the delivery of the verdict in the blogger Ananta Bijoy Das murder case.

Sylhet Anti- Terrorism Special Tribunal’s judge Nurul Amin Biplob fixed the date after completing the hearing of the case, said court sources.

Ananta, also a science writer, was hacked to death by a group of youths near his home in Sylhet city’s Subidbazar area on May 12, 2015 while he was on his way to work along with his sister.

# Elderly man beaten to death by neighbours

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Chapainawabganj

An elderly man was beaten to death allegedly by his neighbours over a trivial matter in Chapainawabganj’s Shibganj yesterday morning.

The deceased, Monzur Rahman, 65, was a resident of Azmotpur village in the same upazila. Chowdhury Jubaeer Ahmed, OC of Shibganj Police Station, said Monzur was cutting a tree branch overhanging into his house in Azmotpur village around 8:30am.

At one stage, neighbours Danesh Ali, Kayes Ali, and several others exchanged heated words with him. They beat up Monzur, his brother- in- law Salek and nephew Akah Ali, leaving Monzur dead on the spot and the two others wounded, the OC added.

The injured were undergoing treatment at Shibganj upazila health complex.

# Tigresses make their mark

FROM PAGE 1

comeback to restrict Pakistan to 225 for 9 after 50 overs.

Pakistan, at one stage though, found themselves 183 for two in 41.5 overs following a 91- run opening stand, but things quickly fell apart as Fahima Khatun and Rumana Ahmed, the two leg spinners, spun their magic. Pakistan lost

five wickets in the span of five runs and 13 deliveries as Fahima and Rumana bagged three and two wickets, respectively.

Sidra Ameen had kept the hopes alive for the losing side till the 48th over as the opening batter struck a century before she was run- out for 104 off 140 balls.

Earlier, Bangladesh posted 234 for seven after

being sent in to bat first. Opener Sharmin Akter ensured a solid start, scoring 44 runs, before Fargana Hoque and skipper Nigar stitched a 96- run stand for the third wicket. The latter had departed on 46 but Fargana went on and top- scored with 71 off 114 balls, featuring five boundaries, to aid her side in posting a winning total in the end.

FROM PAGE 1

Besides, the total sugar content in one serving (250 ml) of the soft drinks is 20.8- 28.8 grams (gm). For energy drinks, it is 22.6- 37.0 gm.

The maximum allowable daily level under WHO guidelines is less than 25 gm.

“If anybody consumes a single serving of fizzy drink, it gives enough sugar for a person in a day,” said AHM Golam Kibria, lead investigator of the study, at the event where the findings were disclosed.

Energy drinks are banned in a 2018 regulation, but they are still sold under different names, said Sahadev Chandra Saha, deputy director at

the Bangladesh Food Safety Authority.

A similar study was conducted on the popular fast foods fried chicken and French fries by the top five brands in terms of sales and the findings were equally alarming.

One serving of French fries (100gm) was found to contain 0.45 gm of sodium – which is one- quarter the daily recommended limit of 2 gm – and 0.093 mg of arsenic, which is 42.3 percent of the maximum allowable limit of 0.22 mg.

There was 0.11 gm of trans- fatty acids, whose daily allowable intake amount is 2.2 mg, and 0.003 mg of lead, whose daily limit is 0.25 mg.

One serving of fried

chicken (100gm) had 0.46 gm of sodium, 0.0053 mg of arsenic, 0.006 mg of lead and 0.13 gm of trans- fatty acid.

“Awareness among the consumers and strict monitoring by the regulatory bodies of Bangladesh should be raised to reduce the health impacts of fast food,” said Sajia Islam, lead investigator and a researcher at the Department of Public Health and Informatics at the BSMMU.

Meanwhile, nine commonly consumed packaged snacks such as crisps, Bombay mix, fried peas, fried pulis, noodles, biscuit, lozenge, lollipop, milk chocolate, chutney and ice cream were found to contain excess amount of

salt, sugar and saturated fat.

None of the brands could make health claims in the star rating scheme and the UK traffic light system due to the high content of the critical nutrients and most of the products misreported the nutrient content in the label, said Mohd Abdullah Al Mamun, assistant professor at National Heart Foundation Hospital and Research Institute.

“There is an urgent need for modification in the processing of commonly consumed packaged and processed foods to make these healthy and strict regulations for appropriate nutritional labelling,” he added.

All three studies showed that most of the

readily available foods and packaged foods consumed every day have been increasing the risk of non- communicable disease, Md Khalequzzaman, associate professor of PHI at the BSMMU, told The Daily Star yesterday.

“Businessmen control the market as per their will – such injustice is not seen anywhere in the world,” said Enamul Hoque, deputy director at the Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institution.

At the discussion session, experts and researchers from different institutions and government regulatory bodies stressed on collective approach to stop the consumption of unhealthy fast food.

# Just a little relief

FROM PAGE 1

waiver,” said Ghulam Rahman, president of Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB).

Responding to reporters at a press briefing yesterday, Commerce Minister Tipu Munshi said the government would cut VAT at the import stage to 10 per cent from 15 per cent to enable consumers better afford the cooking oil.

The VAT waiver comes after public outcry after the key cooking ingredient became scarce in the domestic market amid slow release by refiners, stocking by a section of traders to make hefty profits in the wake of surging prices in the international market following Russia’s invasion of Ukraine last month.

Yesterday, a five- litre container of soybean oil was selling for as high as Tk 820 at some retail outlets in Dhaka, up from government- determined prices of Tk 795 for the same.

Bangladesh annually consumes roughly 20 lakh tonnes of edible oil and has to import 90 percent

of the key essential from countries like Argentina, Brazil, Indonesia and Malaysia.

Taslim Shahriar, senior assistant general manager of Mehgna Group of Industries (MGI), said keeping the 15 percent VAT at the import level means the burden would be passed on to the consumers as refiners would not be able to get rebate of the VAT paid at import stage.

“Now, VAT that we will pay at import will become cost as we will not be able to claim rebate at production stage as per the rule,” he said.

As a result, VAT burden on consumers will decline by up to Tk 1.5 per litre, he said.

An official of City Group, another leading importer and processor, said the price drop could be as high as Tk 3 per litre following the withdrawal of indirect tax at production and trading stage.

CAB President Ghulam said consumers may get some relief for future imports if the government

waived VAT at the import stage.

CONCERNS FOLLOWING ARGENTINA’S MOVE

Much of the gain in VAT removal is likely to be eaten by the soaring prices of edible oil in the global market for various factors.

The decision of Argentina, the top global exporter of both soybean meal and oil, will likely roil the global soy market, which has seen prices spike on Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, reports Reuters. Refiners in Bangladesh said they would have to pay increased attention to buy palm oil from the international market following the export curb by Argentina.

“We will also buy more soybeans for crushing to extract oils,” Taslim Shahriar said.

“We are importing to ensure supply in the domestic market but prices are higher,” he added.

Biswajit Saha, director of corporate affairs of City Group, said, “We are trying to import from various sources to ensure supply.”

# Majority would never get their money back

FROM PAGE 1

crore in the payment gateways.

The chairperson Shamima Nasrin and chief executive officer Mohammad Rassel were sent to jail for defrauding customers, and a government- appointed board, led by Justice AHM Shamsuddin Chowdhury Manik, is scratching its heads wondering how Evaly customers would be refunded.

In a comical Hail Mary, the board had broken into Evaly’s locker on February 1 last year, only to find a measly Tk 2,500 in cash and some blank cheques.

Sirajganjshop has roughly Tk 3.5 lakh stuck in the payment gateways, but it allegedly owes its

clients tens of crores of taka. With no money in sight, the directorate’s rate of disposal of customer complaints regarding Sirajganjshop currently stands at 17.65 percent.

The rate of disposal of complaints against Dhamaka Shopping, another beleaguered ecommerce company, stands at 16.27 percent.

According to the sellers’ organisation, this company owes Tk 200 crores to suppliers, while law enforcers said the company received Tk 800 crore from consumers but could deliver about 20 percent of the products. The owner is abroad, absconding.

In major trouble are also the defrauded customers of 24Tkt, an airline ticketing

service. Ministry data shows it has only Tk 5 stuck in one payment gateway, and Dhaka Metropolitan Police’s Criminal Investigation Department said the firm swindled as much as Tk 50 crore.

Two directors of the company are in prison, while the others are absconding.

Complaints concerning Alesha Mart saw a disposal rate of only 3.09 percent. “The firm has Tk 42 crores stuck in payment gateways. They have already paid Tk 4 crore, but will need to be managing Tk 230 crores more,” said AHM Shafiquzzaman, chief of the Central Digital Commerce Cell under the commerce ministry.

Meanwhile, even

though the disposal rate of complaints against Priyoshop.com stands at 72 percent, the company has only Tk 17 crores stuck in payment gateways. Last year, the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit had sought its bank details.

Qcoom customers can rest assured, since as much as Tk 391 crore are with five payment gateways, including Foster Corporation. The customers of the platform and Alesha Mart have already started getting their money back in phases.

“The nine gateway organisations have been instructed to refund the funds to the customers,” said Shafiquzzaman.

The nine gateways are Bkash Ltd, Nagad, SSL, even

Foster Corp Ltd, The City Bank Ltd, Dutch Bangla Bank Ltd, United Commercial Bank Ltd, Southeast Bank Ltd, and ShurjoMukhi.

That the abysmal disposal rates are caused by the fact that the rights body is literally stacked against Ponzi schemes can be proved by its success rates in solving complaints in other fields. When ecommerce complaints are excluded, the directorate has had a 92 percent success rate over the last decade.

“With the owners and management officials in jail, it is difficult to dispose of complaints. Those outside the jails are trying to manage the money somehow,” Shafiquzzaman added.