

CAP 10 OF THE STEEL INDUSTRY

BSRM WINS THE BEST BRAND AWARD FOR THE 10TH TIME IN A ROW

COUNTRY'S NO. 1 STEEL EXPERT

BSRM
building a safer nation

ROOPPUR NUCLEAR POWER PLANT

Proud Construction Partner

SHAH CEMENT

RENTAL POWER PLANTS Five get 2yr extensions

No more capacity payments

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday handed two-year tenure extensions to five high-cost quick rental companies on condition that they will not be paid when they are not supplying electricity.

In a meeting, the cabinet committee on purchase approved the tenure extension of five fuel-based private companies that will sell the government power at Tk 16.40 per kWh. The rate was Tk 17.52 per kWh earlier.

"We've given them conditions -- no electricity, no pay," said Finance Minister AHM Mosatafa Kamal, who presided over the meeting.

"They were given approval first under the condition that they will be paid even if they do not supply. This time we'll pay only for the power they supply," he said at a briefing after the meeting.

Asked about the reason for extending the tenures even though the country has surplus production, he said the public sector power plants are yet to attain full power generation capacity.

"To be self-reliant, these power plants need to increase their production by another 3,000 MW," he said, adding that these plants would require another one or two years to do so.

That is why the government extended the tenure by two years although the private companies had asked for a five-year extension, said the finance minister.

Earlier Nasrul Hamid, state minister for power, energy

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



FOR THE SAKE OF PLAY ... Due to the absence of playgrounds and open fields, a group of youngsters kick up sand next to a brick kiln in Borni area of Sylhet's Companiganj upazila to practise their football skills. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Record diarrhoea patients at icddr,b

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The icddr,b in Dhaka has been struggling to cope with the deluge of diarrhoea patients over the last week.

Most of the patients are from Dhaka and nearby areas, according to the hospital.

A total of 1,272 -- or a record number of around 53 patients per hour -- were admitted to the hospital in the last 24 hours till 12:00am yesterday.

In the last seven days, 8,152 patients were admitted.

To provide services to additional patients, the International Centre for Diarrheal Disease and Research, Bangladesh authorities have arranged makeshift facilities on the hospital premises.

"The majority of the patients are from the capital's Jatrabari area. During the height of the Covid-19 pandemic, the daily number of patients decreased to 100. But people now most probably have given up hand-washing practices and have been consuming street foods," Baharul Alam, chief of the icddr,b, told The Daily Star yesterday.

He advised people to drink clean water and avoid street food to stay safe from diarrhoea.

Usually, around 400-500 diarrhoea patients come to the hospital daily to take treatment, which slightly increases before monsoon and reaches the peak by the last week of April.

During the first week of March, 500 patients were admitted daily on an average, which increased to 600 the second week.

The average exceeded 1000-mark on March 17, icddr,b said.

It has been providing treatments, free of cost. The patients are discharged from hospital within 24 hours usually, according to the hospital authorities.



Govt extends Khaleda's jail term suspension

BSS, Dhaka

The government has extended the suspension of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia's jail sentence for another six months.

The Ministry of Home Affairs yesterday issued a notification in this regard, saying that the conditional suspension of Khaleda's jail sentence will come into effect from March 25, 2022, Public Relations Officer Sharif Mahmud Apu of the ministry told BSS.

With this, the government has so far suspended Khaleda Zia's

SEE PAGE 6 COL 7

Restart year-long ration card system

Consumer rights body demands

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The National Consumers Rights Movement (NCRM) yesterday demanded re-introduction of the year-long ration card system as scores return empty-handed after queuing for hours for commodities at a subsidised rate.

The prices of essentials are so prohibitive now that the general people cannot afford them even after cutting back on their daily expenditures, said Muhammad Ata Ullah Khan, president of NCRM, at a human chain in front of the National Press Club.

"Please visit the home of a day labourer and see what his family has for a meal to get the real picture. The situation will be worse during the upcoming Ramadan. Only the rich will be able to afford the commodities."

He went on to call for year-long ration cards, which were provided at the start of the pandemic as the economy went on recess.

With the card, one could buy 20 kilograms of rice per month at Tk 10. At present, the government has provided family cards to 88 lakh low-income families.

Using the card, the household can purchase two litres of edible oil at Tk 110 per litre, two kg sugar at Tk 55 per kg, two kg of lentil at Tk 65 per kg twice: once between March 20 and March 31 and then between April 3 and April 18.

Otherwise, the syndicates will continue to hold people hostage at will by hiking the prices of essentials, Khan said, while demanding stern action against the syndicates.

On any pretext, the country's consumer goods market becomes unstable even if there are sufficient stocks.

For instance, the prices of essentials have increased several times for the Ukraine-Russia war. "The impact of the war should not be felt on items that are produced in the country or on most of the consumer goods," Khan added.

MIGRANTS ABROAD

Investigate their unnatural deaths

Ask rights activists, researchers

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladeshi migrant rights activists and researchers have demanded that authorities investigate the unnatural deaths of migrant workers in the destination countries, including those in the Gulf.

They also called upon the labour-recipient countries to set up teams of inspectors and medical examiners in facilities that engaged migrant workers and to introduce non-invasive autopsy procedures in consultation with experts.

These observations came at the launching of a multi-country report on "The death of migrant workers in the Gulf", organised at a Dhaka hotel yesterday, by the Refugee and Migratory Movements Research Unit (RMMRU).

According to the report, the bodies of migrant workers received at the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport are 1,951 from January to September in 2021, 1,807 in 2020 and 2,165 in 2019.

A Human Rights Watch report on Oman and UAE noted that 21 out of 87 domestic workers who were interviewed experienced "psychological or health problems upon their return because of their exploitative working conditions in the Gulf."

Suicide attempts by female migrant workers have been documented as well.

RMMRU Executive Director Dr CR Abrar said the competition among the countries of origin

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4



People jostle at a TCB centre for essentials at subsidised prices at ward-9 in Khulna city's Khalishpur. They have been suffering as their cards don't carry names of the designated centres and they have to go from one to the other to see if their names match with those on the councillors' lists. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

Infant Covid jab trial succeeded Says Moderna

AFP, Washington

US biotech firm Moderna yesterday said it was pursuing regulatory approval for its Covid vaccine in children aged six months to six years after the two-shot regimen was found to be safe and produced a strong immune response.

Specifically, two doses of 25 micrograms given to this age group generated similar levels of antibodies to two doses of 100 micrograms given to young people aged 18-25, indicating there would be similar levels of protection.

Based on the data, Moderna said it would submit authorisation requests to the US FDA, European Medicines Agency (EMA) and other global regulators in the coming weeks.

Chemists remove microplastics using okra

AFP, Washington



Extracts of okra and other slimy plants commonly used in cooking can help remove dangerous microplastics from wastewater, scientists said Tuesday.

The new research was presented at the meeting of the American Chemical Society, and offers an alternative to the synthetic chemicals currently used in treatment plants that can themselves pose risks to health.

"In order to go ahead and remove microplastic or any other type of materials, we should be using natural materials which are non-toxic," lead investigator Rajani Srinivasan, of Tarleton State University, said in an explainer video.

Okra is used as a thickening agent in many cuisines a stew from Louisiana. It's also a staple of cuisine in South Asia, where it's called bhindi.