



“Stronger sanctions are needed so that Russia doesn’t have a chance to pursue this war further in Europe.”

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky

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B1 Returning to profit

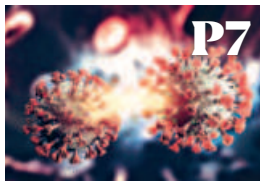
65pc Japanese firms 'would make profit'



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Arable land

Pond worries farmers in Lalmonirhat



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Covid risks

WHO warns of virulent variant



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Biennial World Cup

FIFA boss backtracks on plans

DHAKA-CTG CONNECTIVITY PLANS Going nowhere as govt keeps flip-flopping

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Indecision, short-sightedness and piecemeal measures have long been plaguing the government plan to upgrade Dhaka-Chattogram corridor, considered the economic lifeline of the country.

In 2013, the government decided to build an expressway, considering the fast-growing traffic between the two cities.

After spending around Tk 100 crore on preparatory work, the government dropped the plan in 2019 and instead decided to build a rather expensive high-speed rail system. The feasibility study alone cost Tk 110.16 crore.

But the authorities later opted to go slow, considering the large investment required for the construction.

Meanwhile, the question of how the growing traffic will be handled remains unanswered. The government has some plans, but those are piecemeal measures.

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) has taken two projects involving Tk 1,361 crores – one for building four underpasses and a u-loop and another for maintenance of the highway.

Construction of service lanes or roads running parallel to the highway for slower vehicles is now being planned by the RHD.

On the other hand, Bangladesh Railway (BR) is planning to build a chord line, the shortest possible route, between Dhaka and Cumilla via Narayanganj to reduce the distance between Dhaka and Chattogram by almost 100 km.

BR has just started the process of hiring consultants to study its feasibility. It will take at least two-three years to begin physical work if it's found feasible, officials said.

But experts are critical of the decisions.

“Dropping the expressway was a short-sighted decision... The government should improve Dhaka-Chattogram communication by building an expressway for the sake of economic growth,” transport expert Prof Shamsul Hoque told The Daily Star.

As much as 80-90 percent of the country's trade is carried out using the Dhaka-Chattogram highway, which is not possible with railways, he said.

Of the eight major highways, the government should first develop an expressway between the capital and port city, he said, adding that more delays will raise the expenses and make the task more difficult.

Jashim Uddin, president of the Federation of Bangladesh Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said the average speed of vehicles on major highways is around 30km. Bangladesh's competitiveness in export will rise by six to seven percentage points if the average speed on Dhaka-Chattogram highway reaches 80km, which can best be achieved with an expressway, he added.

The government should also look at the waterways and railways.

PLAGUED BY INDECISIONS

The government in 2004 decided to build a limited-access road. Four years later, the ADB financed a feasibility study and concept designs of a four-lane Dhaka-Chattogram highway and an access-controlled expressway, according to documents of the multilateral lender.

In 2009, the daily average number of vehicles on the highway was between 20,000 and 25,000. Forty percent of them were trucks. It was expected that the number could reach 66,000 in 2030, according to the documents.

In March 2013, the Cabinet Committee on Economic Affairs approved the expressway project under Public-Private Partnership.

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“Dropping the expressway was a short-sighted decision... The government should improve Dhaka-Chattogram communication by building an expressway for the sake of economic growth.”



Failing to get water from Dhaka Wasa, residents of Trimohoni Purbara area in the capital's Khilgaon took it upon themselves to arrange water by installing deep tube-wells. Around 150 households have to pay Tk 1.50 lakh every month for electricity needed to run the pumps and maintenance. The meters, in the photo taken yesterday, show how much water each house uses.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

‘3 stooges colluding with a foreign power’

Pak PM, in a televised address, alleges plot afoot to oust him; debate on no-trust vote postponed

AGENCIES

Fighting for his political life, Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan yesterday accused “three stooges” of colluding with a foreign power to oust him as a debate on a no-confidence motion against him in parliament was postponed.

No Pakistan premier has ever seen out a full term, and Khan is facing the biggest challenge to his rule since being elected in 2018, with opponents accusing him of economic mismanagement and foreign-policy bungling.

“They want Imran Khan to be ousted and want this certain person to take this place and everything will be fine then. But do you want someone charged of a fraud to lead you?” Khan asked in televised live address to the nation possibly referring to Shehbaz Sharif, tipped to become the next prime minister if

Khan is ousted.

Khan said the foreign forces have “developed a liking for” Shehbaz, Fazlur Rehman and Asif Ali Zardari, three leaders of the opposition, as they “know where there money and properties are.”

The Pakistan opposition is headed by the Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) and the Pakistan People's Party (PPP) – two usually feuding dynastic groups that dominated national politics for decades until Khan forged a coalition against them.

Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam (JUI), headed by Rehman, is another key party in the opposition alliance.

After explaining why he entered politics, the Pak PM discussed a ‘threat letter’ that purportedly shows “evidence” of a foreign conspiracy to oust his government. In what

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Ukraine war a ‘wake-up call’

US envoy in Dhaka says his country will beef up Indo-Pacific security

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The US will bolster security in the Indo-Pacific region as threats are evolving, said US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas yesterday, while terming Russia's invasion of Ukraine a wake-up call.

“We will work with Bangladesh and other partners to ensure the region's seas and skies are governed and used according to international law,” he said at a conference.

The conference was jointly organised by the US Embassy in Dhaka and the Centre for Bay of Bengal Studies of Independent University Bangladesh (IUB) at the latter's auditorium.

“Russia's brutal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine is a wake-up call to the world. These ideals cannot be taken for granted; rather, they must be defended,” Haas said.

The goal of defending the ideals is not to keep any country down, but to protect the rights of all countries to choose their own path free from coercion and intimidation, added the envoy.

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BUSINESS

SPECTRUM AUCTION

Bangladesh's four mobile phone operators bought 190 megahertz of spectrum for \$1.23 billion or Tk 10,645 crore yesterday, a development that could alleviate customers' woes centring agonisingly low internet speeds and subpar voice services.

The spectrum auction, participated by Grameenphone, Robi, Banglalink and Teletalk at InterContinental Dhaka, set two records in terms of revenue generation and the amount of spectrum sold.

STORY ON B1



Bangladesh all-rounder Mehedi Hasan Miraz's excitement knew no bounds as he had South Africa's Keegan Petersen run out with a direct hit from point during the first day of the first Test at Kingsmead in Durban yesterday. South Africa, however, finished strongly as they scored 233 for four in 76.5 overs before play was stopped early due to bad light.

PHOTO: AFP

Bangladeshi journo, engineer freed in Libya

SHARIFUL HASAN

Bangladeshi journalist Zahidur Rahman and expatriate engineer Saiful Islam Tipu, who had gone missing in Tripoli, were released from the “safe custody” of the Libyan authorities yesterday.

“I've got a new life,” Zahidur told The Daily Star around 9:45pm (Bangladeshi time) following his release around 7:00pm.

“I would like to thank the Bangladesh government, especially the foreign ministry and the ambassador to Libya, as well as the media for all their support. I am grateful to all of them.”

He was kept at the Bangladesh embassy in Libya last night. The Daily Star talked to him over the phone with help of Ambassador Maj Gen SM Shamim-Uz-Zaman.

Tipu's father Darul Islam expressed his gratitude getting his son back.

“My son has just come home. The ambassador came and gave him to us,” he told this correspondent over the phone from Libya.

Zahidur, a special correspondent of private television NTV, went to the war-torn country on March 21. He, along with Tipu and their Libyan driver Mohammad Khaled, went missing two days later.



ZAHDUR



SAIFUL

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