

## Evaly chairman out on bail

### STAR REPORT

Six months after landing in jail in cases filed over allegations of embezzlement of customers' money, e-commerce platform Evaly's Chairman Shamima Nasrin walked out of jail yesterday.

She was released from Kashimpur Women's Central Jail in Gazipur on bail around 5:45pm, Senior Jail Superintendent Halima Khatun told The Daily Star.

A post from Evaly's verified Facebook page said its chairman got bail.

Shamima got bail in six cases over the last three months, court sources said.

On September 16 last year, Rab arrested Evaly CEO Mohammad Rassel and his wife during a raid at their home in the capital's Mohammadpur.

Later, five other embezzlement cases were filed against the couple with Dhanmondi Police Station as well as with courts.

In March last year, the central bank found that Evaly's dues were Tk 404 crore as of the middle of March that year, including Tk 214 crore liabilities to customers.

### ‘FALSE CASE’

## Nazmul Huda charged for suing SK Sinha

### COURT CORRESPONDENT

A Dhaka court yesterday framed charges against former BNP minister Nazmul Huda in a case filed over the lodging of a fake case against former Chief Justice Surendra Kumar Sinha.

Huda, now on bail, pleaded not guilty and demanded justice after Judge Sheikh Hafizur Rahman of the Special Judge's Court-9 of Dhaka read out the charges to him, The Daily Star learnt from court officials present.

Earlier in the day, the judge dismissed a petition submitted for relieving him of the charges. The judge then fixed May 17 for starting the case's trial.

On November 1 last year, the Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) Director Benjir Ahmed, also the investigation officer of the case, submitted the charge sheet against the former minister.

Huda filed the case against Sinha with Shahbagh Police Station on September 27, 2018. He said Sinha had demanded a bribe from him for changing the judgement of a graft case that had already been disposed of.

The ACC found the allegations baseless and false after probing the case for one and a half years.

The national anti-graft watchdog submitted the final report on December 4 of 2019 absolving Sinha from the charges of the case.

ACC Director Syed Iqbal Hossain filed the case with its integrated district office in Dhaka on February 19, 2020.



**Locals repairing an embankment in Kalnar haor in Sunamganj on Tuesday. Many such embankments in the district have been damaged by flash floods recently and locals in some areas have taken it upon themselves to do repair work in order to protect their properties.**

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

### FLASH FLOODS HIT HAOR REGION

## Desperate farmers try to save half-ripe crops

### OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

The government invests a significant amount of public money to construct and repair levees in the haor areas of the country's north-eastern districts to protect the Boro harvest from the flash floods.

However, the farmers in the region suffer for years because of the poor quality work.

On Friday, the flash flood hit the districts -- Sunamganj, Netrokona, Kishoreganj and Sylhet -- and the levees started cracking and breaking apart.

As a result, vast cropland in the region that was left unprotected by the levees started flooding fast.

The situation is intense in Sunamganj.

Some 520km levees were constructed and repaired spending Tk 120 crore to protect Boro harvest in 222,850 hectares of land.

On Tuesday, Dharmapasha upazila's levees at Chandra Shonar Thal haor, Gurnar haor and Sonamorol haor broke.

Two other dykes in Shalla upazila -- on Koiyarbon haor and Putia haor -- were also damaged.

Meanwhile, more than 100 dykes were cracked during this time, claimed rights activists citing farmers.

However, the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) in Sunamganj could not give any data on how many dykes cracked or broke because of flash floods.

Jahurul Islam, executive engineer of Sunamganj

BWDB, said, "We are not counting the damaged levees but focusing on holding up the floodwater as much as possible. Locals are helping us voluntarily to protect the levees."

To protect the dykes, thousands of farmers from all levee-adjacent areas have been passing hard times holding up the levees with mud, bamboo and other materials.

Abul Hossain, farmer of Kauhani village in Madhyana upazila, said, "We are passing restless days and nights on the levees so that we could save our harvest."

Meanwhile, Haor Bachao Andolon, a rights organisation, arranged a procession in Sunamganj town protesting against corruption, anomalies and negligence in the construction of the levees.

Later they submitted a memorandum to the Prime Minister via Sunamganj's deputy commissioner's office demanding punishment for those involved.

Zahangir Hossain, deputy commissioner of Sunamganj and president of the district committee for constructing levees, declared forming a probe body to investigate the alleged corruption and anomalies.

During a visit to Chandra Shonar Thal haor in Dharmapasha, he told journalists that no matter who was responsible for the low-quality works at the levees, legal actions would be taken against them if found guilty in the probe.

## Zila Parishad bill passed with provision for administrator

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Zila Parishad (amendment) Bill 2022 was passed in parliament with a provision to appoint an administrator in the local government body.

BNP and Jatiya Party MPs strongly opposed the bill, saying the provision was contradictory to the constitution.

It is a bid to appoint local Awami League leaders as the administrators, they said, demanding that the bill be withdrawn.

According to the bill, zila parishad chairmen and members will not hold on to the posts once the five-year tenure is over. Then the government would appoint an administrator to run the local body until the formation of the next parishad.

The administrator will get a 180-day tenure and one person cannot be an administrator more than once.

## Small trader hacked to death

### OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A 30-year-old scrap metal trader was hacked to death in Fatullah, Narayanganj, yesterday afternoon.

Muhammad Shamim, 30, of Paragaon area of Munshiganj, was killed over a business rivalry, police said, adding that they detained two suspects of the murder.

A local tea stall owner said he saw 14-15 men attack Shamim with sharp weapons.

"I tried to stop them and got injured," he added.

Arif Pathan, sub-inspector at Fatullah Model Police Station, said police were looking for the suspects.

## Rohingya man arrested with Tk 11 lakh

### OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

Police in Cox's Bazar arrested a Rohingya man with Tk 11 lakh during a raid on Kutupalong refugee camp on Tuesday night.

Officers said the arrestee, Kamal Hossain, 40, could be involved in money laundering.

Captain Naimul Haque of the Armed Police Battalion said, "He failed to answer our questions during interrogation. We filed a case against him with the Ukhia Police Station."

## US approves \$95m sale of missile defense support to Taiwan

### AFP, Washington

The US announced Tuesday it has approved the sale of up to \$95 million worth of training and equipment to support Taiwan's Patriot missile defense system, something Taipei said would help protect the island from any invasion by China.

"The proposed sale will help to sustain (Taiwan's) missile density and ensure readiness for air operations," the Pentagon's Defense Security Cooperation Agency said in a statement.

## Must not lose

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unsettled commodity markets.

He said they think the direct impact of the war would be limited for Bangladesh, which doesn't have that much trade with Russia and Ukraine as of now.

The economist, however, hinted that the indirect impact of the war would be high for Bangladesh.

In terms of export, Europe is one of the important markets for Bangladesh. If the war lingers on, the global

economy, especially the Eastern European economy, will be hit hard, and Bangladesh will be affected as a result of that, he noted.

Oil, gas and commodity prices will continue to rise if the war goes on for long, he said.

Hong, however, said, "As of now, it is quite difficult to say... The war is raging on and we are seeing developments every day."

The ADB would monitor the situation and assess its impact on Bangladesh, he added.

## Govt to ensure

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was a co-panelist.

Momen is now visiting the US, where he held bilateral meetings with his US counterpart Antony Blinken and USAID Administrator Samantha Power. He also took part in discussions organised by Washington-based think tanks.

At Tuesday's discussion, he said people in Bangladesh have been using social media freely, but sometimes some of them spread hatred and seek to incite violence, for which the DSA was framed.

"You cannot put up anything that incites violence... Some individuals spread rumours. However, there are concerns that there may have been some excesses and we agree.

"Our law ministry has taken a strong position in this regard."

He said the Bangladesh media is completely free.

Isobel said the space for democracy in the civil society is a critically important issue and USAID has shared its concerns in this regard.

She said the USAID has increased its programmes in the democracy portfolio to ensure freedom of media and civil society.

"We want to make sure Bangladesh remains on a strong trajectory," Isobel said, acknowledging the country's progress over the last 50 years.

Momen said Bangladesh now faces the major challenges of climate change and that the US could take a leadership role in mobilising the yearly \$100 billion fund under the Paris Agreement.

He expressed satisfaction that USAID agreed to provide technical assistance for strong coastal embankments.

On Tuesday, Momen met Senator Chuck Schumer (D-NY), the Majority Leader of the US Senate, and Congressman Steve Chabot (R-OH), member of House Foreign Affairs Committee.

He also attended a meeting with the US Chamber of Commerce's US-Bangladesh Business Council.

## Padma bridge now to open by year-end

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BR is implementing a Tk 39,246.79 crore Padma Bridge Rail Link Project to build a 169-km rail line from Dhaka to Jashore through the Padma bridge. **CHANGE IN DEADLINE**

Although the fast-track project was approved in August 2007, physical work started only in November 2014 mainly due to complications over funding before the government decided to implement the project with its own funds.

After several revisions, the deadline of the project was set to June 2023, including a one-year defect liability period, and the

cost rose to Tk 30,193 crore from the original Tk 10,161 crore.

On December 10, 2020, when the last span of Padma Bridge was installed, Cabinet Secretary Khandker Anwarul Islam had said the bridge would be opened to the public by June 2022.

Obaidul Quader reiterated the deadline on several occasions and on Sunday, after a meeting over the progress of the project, his ministry reconfirmed the deadline in a press release.

The overall progress of the project was 92 percent -- 97 percent in the main

bridge and 90.5 percent in river training works, read the press release. The progress of the carpeting work was 65.68 percent.

The meeting was attended, among others, by the cabinet secretary, who earlier had a long tenure as bridge division secretary.

Asked about the prime minister's speech, the cabinet secretary after yesterday's weekly cabinet meeting told reporters, "The original deadline of the project is December 2022. We are trying... I will talk with her [PM]."

He said there is logic behind her speech as the project authorities are

facing problems to bring some materials from European countries due to the Ukraine War.

Project sources said aluminium railing for the bridge was supposed to come from a UK factory but it was closed for around two years due to Covid.

"But when the materials were ready for shipment, no ship was found to bring those due to the Ukraine war. The materials were supposed to come within March but the shipment started from UK on March 26. It will take 45 days to reach Bangladesh," said one of the project officials, wishing not to be named.

## ‘We’re cautious, no need to worry’

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progressing fast but suddenly its economy is in a crisis," Quader said, voicing concern on whether Bangladesh would be able to repay the loans it is taking.

In response, Hasina, the leader of the House, dismissed the possibility of Bangladesh falling into a debt trap as her government has been regular in loan repayments.

Bangladesh has never defaulted on loan repayment and will not fail in the future, she stated.

In most of the cases, the Awami League government completed projects in due time or before schedule, she said, citing the completion of the 1,320MW Payra power plant within eight months of starting its work as a case in point.

The speedy completion saved Tk 800 crore for the

government, according to Hasina.

The prime minister also touched upon the gridlock in Dhaka city and the spiralling prices of essentials, which are causing immense sufferings to people.

"If everyone abides by the traffic rules and there are fewer cars on the roads, there will be no traffic jam."

The prices of essentials have gone up all over the world due to the pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine war, she said in response to a question from ruling party MP Kazim Uddin Ahmed.

Thanks to the open market sales of the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh, the prices of essentials have come down significantly.

As a pro-people government, hers has taken all-out measures to keep the prices within a tolerable

level, she said, citing the universal pension scheme that is in the works as another example of a pro-people move.

The universal pension scheme would ensure the financial security of the elderly by bringing them under a sustainable and well-organised social security framework, she said in response to a question from Nur Uddin Chowdhury Nayan from Laxmipur-2.

The process of enacting the law and forming an authority under that law is going on.

About the government's outlay on sourcing Covid-19 vaccines, the PM said the country managed to procure them at a relatively low price by negotiating with the countries concerned.

However, since there is a

non-disclosure agreement for the purchase of vaccines, it would not be appropriate to disclose the cost or the related expenses, she said in her reply to a query from Morshed Alam from Noakhali-2.

As of April 4, the government has procured 29.64 crore doses of coronavirus vaccines.

Hasina also talked about the criticism of article 70 of the constitution, which leads to lawmakers losing their seats if they vote against the party that nominated them.

"There is stability and balance in politics due to article 70. On the other hand, those who want to seize power by other means, raise questions about article 70. The reality is democracy in Bangladesh has been stable due to article 70."

## Regain people’s faith

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He claimed Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen requested the US to take steps for bringing the BNP back into elections. "It is a matter of shame that such a request was made to the US ... It is the commission's job to earn the confidence of all political parties."

Daily Ittefaq Editor Tasmina Hossain proposed a staggered national election, saying that such an important election should take place division-wise following a reshuffle in the administration.

New Age Editor Nurul Kabir said people lacked confidence in the Search Committee that recommended the names to the president for appointing the current CEC and other commissioners. "You [EC] will have to work to bring that confidence back."

Daily Samakal Advisory Editor Abu Sayeed Khan said it would be better for the EC to avoid EVMs in the polls.

Daily Prothom Alo's Associate Editor Anisul Hoque said local government and other elections would be a litmus test for the EC before the next Jatiya Sangsad polls.

Daily Jugantor Editor Saiful Alam said it should be ensured that the administration and law enforcers cannot influence the EC during any elections.

Daily Samakal acting editor Muzzammil Husain said journalists are often harassed when they cover polls, so the "highest level of access" of the media

must be ensured during polls.

Daily Observer Editor Iqbal Sobhan Chowdhury said creating political consensus is not the duty of the EC. "It should rather create an environment in which a political party will feel that it will fall behind other parties if it does not take part in an election."

Business Standard Editor Inam Ahmed said different laws are used to tie up the media during election time. Whether these laws can be relaxed during that period should come under consideration, he said.

Daily Ajker Patrika Editor Golam Rahman, columnists Ajay Dasgupta, Bhibhu Ranjan Sarkar, Daily Jugantor Senior Assistant Editor Mahbub Kamal, among others, spoke at the programme.

The Daily Star Executive Editor Syed Ashfaqul Haque, four election commissioners, and top officials of the EC Secretariat also attended the talks.

## Tunisia hits back at Erdogan ‘interference’

### AFP, Tunis

Tunisia has summoned Turkey's ambassador in protest against "interference", the foreign ministry said yesterday, after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan criticised his counterpart in Tunis for dissolving the country's parliament.