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Record hike in soybean oil prices

Latest hike of Tk 38 per litre comes amid severe supply crisis in market

SUKANTA HALDER, MOHAMMAD SUMAN and REFAAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

Edible oil prices see the biggest increase in Bangladesh's history as the government moves to put an end to the unprecedented crunch of the essential cooking item.

The move may help restore the supply of the ingredient but it will deal a major blow to the people already suffering because of higher inflation.

The commerce ministry gave the approval to the price hike of edible oil yesterday in line with the previous proposal of importers, refiners and wholesalers.

The new rates come into effect today, said Tapan Kanti

PER LITRE BOTTLED SOYBEAN OIL

May 2021	Tk 135
Jan 2022	Tk 150
May 2022	Tk 198



Ghosh, senior commerce secretary.

The government has fixed the price of a litre of bottled soybean oil at Tk 198, a 23.75 per cent hike from Tk 160 per litre.

This is the sharpest increase in the soybean oil price in Bangladesh.

"The price of soybean oil has never been increased by Tk 38 a litre at one go," said Md Shafiqul Ather Taslim, director for finance and operations of TK Group, one of the largest cooking oil processors.

The edible oil crisis will be over in the next four to five days because of the new price of soybean oil set by the government, he said.

A litre of loose soybean oil will cost Tk 180, an increase of 32.35 per cent from Tk 136. A five-litre container of soybean oil will sell for Tk 985, up from Tk 760 now.

The government move is aimed at normalising supply, which has come under pressure due to the rising production cost amid higher raw material prices in the international markets and rising shipping costs, supply disruptions and pent-up demand.

The supply situation worsened after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and turned extremely volatile after Indonesia, the biggest shipper of edible oil, imposed a ban on palm oil exports from April 28 to protect its domestic market.

The acute supply crunch perhaps reached its peak when cooking oil literally disappeared from many retail shops across the country in the run-up to Eid, when demand usually goes up. The shortage still persists.

"We delivered enough oil till the day before Eid. We started delivering the item again yesterday. But due to the volatility in the global market, many retailers are stocking soybean oil in the hopes that the government will increase the price after Eid," said Taslim of TK Group.

The new rates are expected to allow businesses to absorb the higher costs.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1



Mustard oil is being poured into a barrel from a grinder in Borodi area of Sonargaon, Narayanganj. Retailers buy the oil from such millers for Tk 180 a litre in bulk. Extractors of mustard oil, which is pricier than soybean oil, used to enjoy a niche market. But it is becoming increasingly popular, especially among the people who consider it as a healthier choice.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

NAHID MURDER Another student arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Rab on Wednesday night arrested a Dhaka College student on charges of attacking Nahid Mia who was beaten and hacked to death during last month's clash between students and shopkeepers of New Market.

The force also arrested two former employees of Welcome Fast Food for their involvement in the clash.

Mahmudul Hasan Siyam, 21, a third-year student, is the sixth suspect to be arrested in connection with the murder of the delivery person.

Siyam was arrested in Shariatpur, Rab Director (legal and media) Khandaker Al Moin told a press conference yesterday.

Fast food shop employees Mehedi Hasan

SEE PAGE 2 COL 8

Three more Bangladeshis in Pandora Papers

Baraka Power shareholder, former DCCI director among them

ZYMA ISLAM

Three more names were disclosed in the final batch of Pandora Papers data, taking the tally of Bangladeshi nationals to have been found to hold shell companies in tax havens in the leaked documents by the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists to nine.

S Hedayet Ullah, S Rumi Saifullah and Shaheda Begum Shanti are the latest Bangladeshis named in the Pandora Papers, which has so far not alleged tax evasion and has instead focused on the use of offshore trusts and shell companies by the super-rich and political classes.

In March 2018, Hedayet Ullah and Rumi Saifullah assigned the Hong Kong-headquartered offshore provider Ilshin to acquire significant stakes in Transglobal Consulting (HK), which was incorporated in 2005.

A Baridhara DOHS address was registered for the two in the records of Ilshin, one of seven offshore providers whose data was leaked in the latest instalment of the Pandora Papers.

The address matched with the one listed as the headquarters of Vincent Group, which is involved in the petroleum, telecommunication, transport communication and garment sectors.

Vincent Group's managing director is Saifullah, who previously served as a director of the Dhaka Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

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Haji Salim back amid controversy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ruling Awami League lawmaker Haji Mohammad Salim, who has been convicted in a corruption case, returns after five days of Thailand visit, which an ACC lawyer calls a "wilful violation of court order".

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan, however, says Haji Salim went abroad and returned in accordance with the law.

Salim arrived in Dhaka on a Thai Airways flight at 12:15pm yesterday. From the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport, he went directly to a Namaz-e-Janaza in Old Dhaka, said Mohiuddin Mahmud, his personal secretary.

The lawmaker left for Bangkok on April 30, raising questions on the legitimacy of travel abroad despite being sentenced to jail for 10 years.

Talking to journalists at the Bangladesh Secretariat around 3:00pm yesterday, the home minister said, "Haji Salim went to Bangkok for urgent treatment, and he has come back."

"Whatever legal questions may arise, he is a member of parliament. He respects the law. He went abroad abiding by the law."

He also said, "After the High Court delivers a verdict, the official copy of the verdict arrives too. Haji Salim went abroad and came back before implementation of



SEE PAGE 7 COL 2



Smoke rises above a burning oil storage in the course of Ukraine-Russia conflict on the outskirts of Donetsk, Ukraine on Wednesday. Related story on page 12.

PHOTO: REUTERS

WORLD PRESS FREEDOM INDEX Bangladesh slips 10 notches

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh has slipped 10 notches in this year's World Press Freedom Index by Reporters Without Borders, also known as Reporters sans frontières (RSF).

Bangladesh ranked 162nd out of 180 countries while its position was 152nd last year, according to the report released yesterday. Bangladesh's position is worse than that of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the report showed.

The country is one of the 28 in the world which saw "very bad" press freedom violations this year.

In order to assign the index, the situation in the country is classified according to certain criteria.

Countries are assessed on whether political pressure from the state or other actors impacts journalism.

They also assess the degree to which journalists and media are free to work without censorship or judicial sanctions, or excessive restrictions on their freedom of expression.

The index also notes whether there is impunity for those responsible for acts of violence against journalists.

Furthermore, it scrutinises the difficulty of creating a news media outlet, and whether advertisers and commercial partners create economic constraints. Also noted is whether media owners seek to promote or defend their business interests.

Of utmost importance to the index is whether journalists face bodily harm, professional harm, intimidation, coercion,

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It's malicious, unacceptable Says info minister

BSS, Chattogram

Rejecting the report of Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF) on Bangladesh's ranking in the World Press Freedom Index, Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud yesterday said the report was "malicious, objectionable and unacceptable".

"Paris-based RSF is always malicious towards Bangladesh. They published a report on our

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the BUSINESS

NOTICE

As economic activities are yet to gain momentum after Eid-ul-Fitr holidays, there are no business pages today. The Star Business will come out regularly from Sunday.

ECONOMIC CRISIS It'll last for at least 2 more yrs Says Sri Lankan govt

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka will have to endure its unprecedented economic hardships for at least two more years, the country's finance minister said Wednesday while warning of an imminent cash crunch.

Months of blackouts and acute shortages of food, fuel and pharmaceuticals have brought widespread suffering across the South Asian island nation.

Public anger has sparked sustained protests demanding the government resign over its mismanagement of the economic crisis, Sri Lanka's worst since independence in 1948.

"People should know the truth. I don't know if people realise the gravity of the situation," Finance Minister Ali Sabry told parliament.

"We won't be able to resolve this crisis in two years, but the actions we take today will determine how much longer this problem will drag."

Sabry said the country now has less than \$50 million in usable foreign exchange reserves, needed to finance

The government will unveil a new budget soon and raise taxes to replenish state revenue.

essential goods to keep Sri Lanka's import-dependent economy ticking over.

Official data shows \$1.7 billion in reserves, but most of that figure includes a Chinese currency swap which cannot be used to pay for imports from other countries.

Sabry said the government had erred by delaying an approach to the International Monetary Fund for a bailout.

Negotiations with the IMF are ongoing but Sri Lanka's central bank chief has said any assistance from the lender is months away.

The government will unveil a new budget soon and raise taxes to replenish state revenue.

"It was a historic mistake to sharply reduce taxes in 2019," Sabry said, adding that the previous central bank chief had also blundered by exhausting foreign reserves to defend Sri Lanka's overvalued currency.

Sri Lanka's economic crisis took hold after the coronavirus pandemic hammered income from tourism and remittances.

Unable to pay for fuel imports, utilities have imposed daily blackouts to ration electricity, while long lines of people snake around service stations for petrol and kerosene.

Hospitals are short of vital medicines and the government has appealed to citizens abroad for donations.



Small boats used by people to commute across the Buriganga are moored in the capital's Dkkhin Keraniganj as the city was still relatively empty yesterday after the Eid holidays. Much larger boats that bring in people from other districts are docked at Sadarghat Launch Terminal on the other side of the river.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

53 CASES OVER HEFAJAT MAYHEM

9 years gone, probe yet to be completed

SHARIFUL ISLAM

Law enforcers are yet to wrap up the investigation of any of the 53 cases filed in the capital over the May 2013 Hefajat mayhem.

The probes remain stalled for nine years though Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan in December 2020 hinted at completing those.

His hint came amid threats by Hefajat-e-Islam leaders of knocking down all sculptures in the country.

The minister then said, "The cases have been pending for quite a long time. We have to dispose of them."

Asked about the state of the investigations, DMP Additional Commissioner (Detective Branch) AKM Hafiz Akhter yesterday said they were yet to complete the probes in any of 53 the cases.

"We had a meeting earlier to complete the investigations, but we could not make much progress as we were busy in tackling other crimes," he told The Daily Star.

On May 5, 2013, thousands of members of Hefajat, a Qawmi

madrasa-based Islamist organisation, clashed with law enforcers and ruling Awami League men, turning the capital's Motijheel and Paltan areas into a battleground.

They set fire to hundreds of shops, vehicles, and police outposts and looted stores, including those

A total of 83 cases were filed in seven districts, including Dhaka, accusing 3,416 named and 84,796 unnamed people. Many of the accused were from the Hefajat, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the BNP.

of Islamic books. Clashes also took place in several other districts in the following couple of days.

Although Hefajat claimed that about 2,000 of its leaders and activists were killed in the incident, the government put the death toll at

13, including three policemen.

The organisation, however, could not provide names and addresses of its men who it claimed to have been killed.

A total of 83 cases were filed in seven districts, including Dhaka, accusing 3,416 named and 84,796 unnamed people. Many of the accused were from the Hefajat, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the BNP.

Police, government officials, relatives of the victims, Islamist leaders, businessmen, shop owners, employees of different offices and political parties filed those cases.

Only one of the cases has so far been disposed of in Bagerhat. Police have pressed charges in 18, and submitted final reports in two others. Investigations of the 62 have been stalled, said police sources.

Of the 83 cases, 53 were filed in the capital against more than 50,000 people, including seven for murder.

Despite several attempts, this correspondent could not reach the home minister yesterday over the phone for comments.

5 cops hurt in clash between AL factions

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Pabna

At least five law enforcers were injured when police tried to control the situation during a clash between two rival AL groups in Pabna's Bera municipality area yesterday.

Arbinda Sarkar, OC of Bera Police Station, said former mayor Abdul Baten and sitting mayor Asif Sams Ranjan had long standing feud over establishing supremacy in the area.

When both groups took position in the port area at noon to attack each other, police, on information rushed to the spot. Asif's men then suddenly began attacking the cops, leaving at least five of them injured, he said.

Police, however, was able to bring the situation under control after removing both groups from the spot.

Additional police force has been deployed in the area and legal action will be taken against the attackers, the OC said.

1 killed, 30 hurt as rivals clash

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Faridpur

A man was killed and 30 injured in a clash between two rival groups in Khardia village of Faridpur's Saltah Upazila yesterday morning.

The dead was identified as Sirajul Islam, 27, a saw-mill worker.

According to locals, there was a longstanding conflict between Rafique Mollah, chairman of Jadunandi union parishad, and Alamgir Mia, president of Jadunandi AL, over establishing supremacy in the area.

Rafique's supporters attacked the houses of Alamgir's supporters with lethal weapons. Sirajul was killed on the spot. In a counter-attack, Alamgir did the same to supporters of Rafique, and vandalised and looted at least 50 homes.

ASP (Nagarkanda circle) Saminur Rahman said police brought the situation under control.

No case was filed in this connection till the filing of this report at 4:30pm.

Beaten by drivers of three-wheelers, man dies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Munshiganj

A farmer died after being beaten by drivers of an auto-rickshaw and mishuk in Sirajdikhan upazila of Munshiganj.

Ali Hossain, 52, a farmer, was a passenger of the auto-rickshaw.

ASP Rashedul Islam, said, "Ali was paying Tk 5 but the driver demanded Tk 10. This created a conflict between them. The mishuk driver from nearby joined in and the two drivers beat the passenger to a point where he was knocked onto the barbed wire of a boundary wall.

He added that after locals settled the dispute and the two drivers left the scene, Ali began feeling sick. He was declared dead by on-duty doctors in hospital.

"The drivers are on the run and a driver to arrest them is underway."

Record hike in soybean oil prices

FROM PAGE 1

The prices of edible oil have been hiked considering the rise in prices of the item in the international markets, Ghosh told The Daily Star over the phone.

Earlier, the government had fixed the price of soybean oil by taking into account the base price of crude soybean oil of \$1,400 per tonne and crude palm oil of \$1,300 per tonne.

Now, a base price of \$1,750 per tonne was considered, the secretary said.

The new price might make all the businesses involved in the cooking oil supply chain happier, but it will deal a major blow to the end consumers.

SM Laizur Rahman, a resident in Mirpur, said the consumption

of oil in his family of eight members has come down due to the increase in the price of soybean oil.

"We have cut back on the consumption of vegetables and fish to free up some money for oil purchase. Now the new price will make it harder for us to afford it at all."

SM Nazim Hossain, vice-president of the Consumers' Association Bangladesh, said

soybean oil prices have been hiked three times in the last four months, including yesterday's increase.

"In the last few months, the prices of essential commodities have gone up. A fresh hike in oil prices will pile more pressure on consumers. And the lower-income people will face an even

more difficult situation," he said, urging the government to take proper steps to bring prices under control.

SUPPLY CRUNCH, BLAME GAME CONTINUE

In the capital, The Daily Star correspondents visited stores in Mirpur 1, 2, 10, 12, Kazipara, Mohammadpur, Green Road, Hatirpool and some areas of old Dhaka yesterday and found no soybean oil in retail stores.

The scenario was the same in Chattogram City's Kazir Dewri, Chawkbazar, Aturar Depot and, Hamzarbagh markets.

"I have not had any soybean oil in my shop for the last 15 days. The dealers can't say when we will get the supply," said Monwar Hossain, owner of Yasin General Store in Karwan Bazar,

the largest kitchen market in the capital.

"Dealers say refiners are not supplying them oil. But if the price rises, maybe dealers can resume supply," he said yesterday morning.

No soybean oil was found in 23 of the 25 shops that these correspondents visited in Karwan Bazar yesterday.

"I have been running this grocery shop for 25 years. This is the first time I could not sell even a litre of soybean oil to my customers before Eid. I have not had any oil in my store for the past three weeks," said Nurul Alam Sikder, a retailer in Pallabi.

In Chattogram, traders said the product was not traded yesterday in Khatunganj, the country's largest wholesale

commodity market.

Abdur Rahim, a wholesaler in Khatunganj, said all kinds of shops, except for those of edible oil dealers and brokers, were open from 10:00am.

"Retailers are placing orders but we are failing to supply them," he mentioned.

On Wednesday, Monjur Mohammad Shariar, director for administration and finance of the Directorate of National Consumers Right Protection under the commerce ministry, said adequate quantity of cooking oil is being supplied by refiners, but most of the dealers and retail traders are stocking the product. As a result, the soybean oil crisis still persists at the retail level.

The supply crunch is

prevailing despite adequate imports in recent months.

According to the National Board of Revenue (NBR), more than 13.68 lakh tonnes of palm oil and soybean oil were imported in the four months to April.

The average import cost of palm oil stood at \$1,180 to \$1,740 per tonne and soybean oil from \$1,380 to \$1,869 per tonne.

Bangladesh imported 13.93 lakh tonnes of palm and soybean oil during the same four-month period in 2021, NBR data showed.

On April 27, AHM Safiquzzaman, additional secretary of the commerce ministry, said the country had edible oil reserves that could meet the demand for at least one and a half months.

Another

FROM PAGE 1

Bappi, 21, and Moazzam Hossain Sajeeb, 23, were

arrested in Cox's Bazar, he said, adding that they cut their hair to deceive cops and were looking for jobs at hotels in the beach town.

Moin said in a CCTV camera footage from April 19, Siyam was seen hitting Nahid with an iron rod after the latter fell to the ground.

Law enforcers are also looking for Emon who was seen hacking the delivery person with a sharp weapon.

On April 18 night, employees of Welcome Fast Food and Capital Fast Food in New Market engaged in a brawl that eventually led to pitched battles the following day, leaving two men dead and many others injured.

The other person who died in the clash was Morsalin. The Rab director yesterday said officers did not find any footage of the incident and were trying to identify the killers.

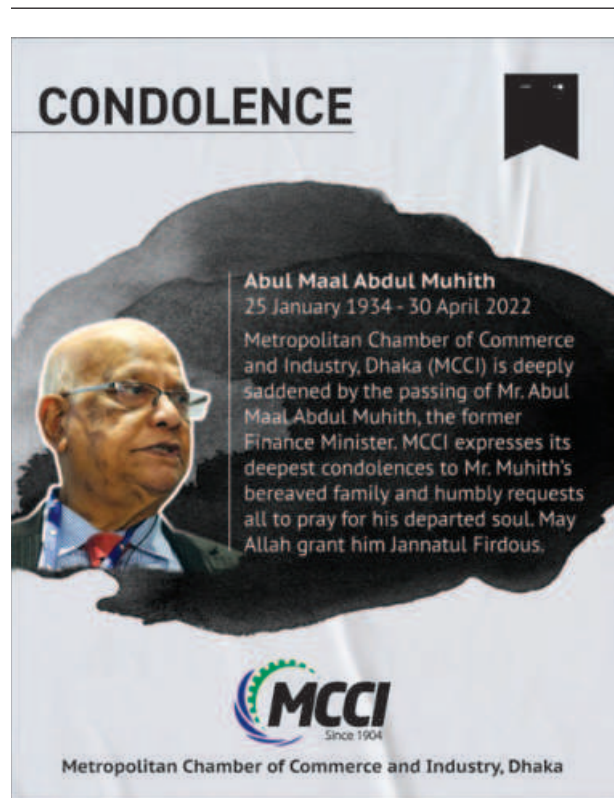
Video footage of the attack on Nahid went viral on social media. Journalists present near the scene took photos and were also attacked.

Five cases, including two for the murders, were filed later.

In one of the cases, police accused 24 individuals, mostly leaders of the BNP and its affiliated bodies.

Besides, over 1,700 unnamed people were accused in the five cases.

Detectives earlier arrested five Dhaka College students involved with Chhatra League in connection with the murder of Nahid.



Bangladesh slips 10 notches

FROM PAGE 1

harassment, surveillance and smear campaigns.

Bangladesh's lowest score was in the "safety" category.

"Exposed to police violence, attacks by political activists and murders orchestrated by Jihadist or criminal organisations, Bangladeshi journalists are all the more vulnerable because this violence goes unpunished," said RSF.

"The Digital Security Act is often used to keep journalists and bloggers in prison, in appalling conditions," it added.

In the wake of World Press Freedom Day, the Editors' Council called upon the authorities concerned to reform the

DSA in order to ensure press freedom in the country.

The council came up with the call in a statement issued on the occasion, undersigned by the council's President Mahfuz Anam and General Secretary Dewan Hanif Mahmud.

"From the very beginning, the Editors' Council and journalists have been concerned and made objections regarding the Digital Security Act. Recently, the law minister also said that there have been numerous [incidents of] misuses of the law and hinted at reforms to it.

The minister's comments proved that the Editors' Council's concerns were

genuinely on point," the statement read.

Stressing that journalists are under digital surveillance across the globe and threatened in upholding their duty in dissemination of information, the Editors' Council cited Unesco Director-General Audrey Azoulay's call to protect journalism and journalists by generating awareness about the benefits and risks of working in the digital age and prepare a roadmap to this end.

"Digital surveillance can reveal the information collected by journalists and expose their sources, thereby lowering the security of the sources. Such surveillance can

also expose journalists' personal information that will in turn lower their own security," it said, adding that such digital measures – surveillance, online harassment, hacking – are being utilised by both state and non-state entities to disrupt journalists in their professional pursuits and also compromising their personal security.

The council observed that security forces in different nations are adopting various digital surveillance measures that are detrimental to the expansion of press freedom.

Stressing that use of digital technology in journalism has become important amid the

ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, the council observed that the need to ensure security to journalists is now more than ever in the digital era.

A separate report by Article 19, launched on the same day, scrutinised the conditions of women journalists in Bangladesh and five other countries.

"Women journalists face additional, gendered, often sexualised threats, discrimination, and misogyny – in their workplaces, when out reporting, and online – not only from the powerful forces that attempt to silence them but also sources, colleagues, and even their own family members."

Dhaka, Delhi to work together for regional dev

Says foreign minister; Bangladesh provides medical assistance to Sri Lanka

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh and India will work together to strengthen regional cooperation and development -- an initiative that comes in the wake of Russia-Ukraine crisis and Covid-19 pandemic that have seriously affected the supply chains and disrupted economies.

"We have discussed the issue with India during the recent visit of Indian External Affairs Minister Dr Jaishankar. We discussed how to strengthen regional cooperation. We will be holding more regional meetings," said Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen yesterday. He said initially the two countries are discussing and then eventually it will be expanded to the other South Asian countries.

"Our prime minister wants not only the development of Bangladesh but also the regional development and cooperation because it is more sustainable," Momen said.

During his one-day visit to Dhaka on April 28, Jaishankar also spoke of improving regional value chain and energy cooperation, especially hydropower, in Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN).

The foreign minister said this at a ceremony at the State Guest House Padma in the capital.

The event was organised to hand over a few boxes of medicine as a token to Sri Lankan High Commissioner

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Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and her younger sister Sheikh Rehana offer prayers at the graves of their martyred family members at Banani Graveyard in the capital on Wednesday, a day after Eid.

PHOTO: PJO

Gas supply resumes in Dhaka

UNB, Dhaka

Gas supply has resumed in different areas in Dhaka city and adjoining areas from yesterday afternoon, said a Titas Gas announcement.

Titas Gas Transmission and Distribution Company Limited suspended the gas supply at 10:00pm on May 3 (Eid Day) for a period of 48 hours in different areas including Amin Bazar, Hemayetpur, Savar EPZ, Ashulia, Manikganj, Dhamrai due to a maintenance work, according to the announcement.

It also said that some areas of the capital may experience low pressure in gas supply during the same period which include Gabtoli, Mazar Road, Kalyanpur, Shyamoli, Mirpur, Mohammadpur and Dhanmondi. Meanwhile, the Gas Transmission Company of Bangladesh (GTCL) in a public notice had also informed that it will suspend gas supply to two high-pressure pipelines for maintenance and replacement works for 48 hours from 10:00pm on May 3.

PRAYER TIMING		MAY 6	
Fazr	Juma	Asr	Maghrib Esha
AZAN 4-15	12-30	4-45	6-21 7-45
JAMAAT 4-50	1-15	5-00	6-24 8-15

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

'Bilateral relations at risk'

ERD warns railways ministry over decision to cancel China's funding for project



The move to find an alternative financier for the project, for converting the existing Akhaura-Sylhet metre-gauge (MG) railroad into a dual-gauge (DG) one, may also create problems in the future, when trying to undertake projects with Chinese funds.

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The finance ministry's Economic Relations Division (ERD) has warned the railways ministry that a "unilateral" decision to cancel China's funding for a Bangladesh Railway (BR) project may deteriorate bilateral relations between the two countries.

The move to find an alternative financier for the project, for converting the existing Akhaura-Sylhet metre-gauge (MG) railroad into a dual-gauge (DG) one, may also create problems in the future, when trying to undertake projects with Chinese funds, it said.

ERD, which deals with foreign-funding related issues on behalf of the government -- in a letter to the railways ministry on April 26 -- also mentioned that the Chinese embassy in Dhaka had expressed concerns over the project on several occasions.

ERD's letter came around two weeks after the Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh Li Jiming wrote to the finance minister to revive negotiations between

BR and the selected Chinese company for signing a commercial deal for early commencement of the Tk 16,104.45 crore project.

Akhaura-Sylhet project was among those projects for which Dhaka and Beijing signed a memorandum of understanding -- during Chinese President Xi Jinping's Dhaka visit in October 2016 -- for implementing them with Chinese assistance.

Ecneec in April 2019 approved the project to convert the 225 km MG line into a 239 km DG line by June 2025, to improve rail link between the capital and Sylhet.

China is supposed to finance 66.16 percent of the total project cost, and China Railway Construction Bridge Engineering Bureau Group Co Ltd (CRBG) was appointed as the contractor to implement the project.

But, the Prime Minister's Office (PMO) in October 2020 had formed a committee to review the negotiated contract prices of the three projects involving China, which included the Akhaura-Sylhet one.

PROJECT TIMELINE

- Dhaka, Beijing sign MoU for Akhaura-Sylhet line in 2016
- Ecneec approved project in April 2019
- PMO directed BR to slash cost by Tk 3,354.31cr in Nov 2020
- Contractors declined to work with reduced budget
- Railways ministry in Nov 2021 asked ERD for alternative funding

The two other projects are Joydebpur-Ishwardi Double Line and Joydebpur-Mymensingh-Jamalpur DG Conversion. Ecneec approved the Tk 14,250.61 crore project in November 2018 to make Joydebpur-Ishwardi section a DG double line. The third project has not been approved.

In November that year, PMO directed BR to slash the cost of Akhaura-Sylhet project by Tk 3,354.31 crore, 20.8 percent of the total outlay.

PMO also directed to slash the cost of two other projects. But contractors of all three projects declined to work with the reduced budget, BR document shows.

Meanwhile, the Chinese government in early last year informed Bangladesh that it would not fund the Joydebpur-Ishwardi project for a "lack of in-depth preliminary work and insufficient feasibility study".

China declined to review the decision following Bangladesh's request.

In this situation, the railways ministry in November last year wrote to ERD, asking

SEE PAGE 4 COL 5

Padma Bridge to open next month

Says Quader

BSS, Dhaka

Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader yesterday said the much-awaited Padma Bridge will be inaugurated in June.

"Padma Bridge will be opened in June for vehicular movement," he told journalists after attending a programme at his Companiganj village home in Noakhali.

About BNP's movement, Quader, also the Awami League general secretary, said BNP failed for movement for 26 times in the last 13 years but they failed to do so. Now people laugh at BNP listening to its call for movement, he mentioned.

Quader, a member of parliament from Noakhali-5 (Companiganj-Kabirhat), also said, "I couldn't come to my area for a long time due to

SEE PAGE 4 COL 8

'EMBEZZLING TK 304CR' 5 members of NSU trustee board sued

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Anti-Corruption Commission (ACC) has filed a case against five members of North South University's (NSU) trustee board and the managing director of a development company for allegedly misappropriating about Tk 304 crore.

NSU Board of Trustees Chairperson Azim Uddin Ahmed, its members -- MA Kashem, Benajir Ahmed, Rehana Rahman and Mohammed Shajahan -- and Ashalay Housing and Developers Managing Director Amin Md Hilaly were accused in the case.

ACC Deputy Director Farid Ahmed Patwary filed the case with its integrated district office in Dhaka yesterday.

According to the case statement, NSU made an agreement with the company for buying land in Jangir, Gutia and Pitolganj mouza of Narayanganj's Rupganj upazila.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2



Only a handful of vehicles are seen in Motijheel area in the capital yesterday. As the Eid spirit has not yet died down, even on the first day after the holidays, Dhaka seemed to be comparatively empty and traffic-free.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

ANANTA MURDER Death reference reaches HC

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The documents of writer and blogger

Ananta Bijoy Das murder case, in which

four persons were sentenced to death, have reached as death reference to the High Court for the examination of the trial court verdict.

Officials of the Sylhet tribunal brought the case documents, including the judgment, to the HC recently, Supreme Court Spokesman Saifur Rahman told The Daily Star yesterday.

If a lower court sentences any person

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



Preparing to face possible cyclone

Says state minister for disaster management

STAR REPORT

A cyclonic system that developed near India's remote Andaman Islands on Wednesday could intensify and hit the coast of Bangladesh, said State Minister for Disaster Management and Relief Md Enamur Rahman yesterday.

"The system is expected to turn into a depression on May 9 and will intensify gradually," he said at a media briefing in Dhaka.

"No prediction has been made yet over the landfall of the system. The authorities will be able to estimate the storm's landfall time in Bangladesh after the low pressure and cyclone are formed," he added.

If the system develops into a storm, it will be called "Cyclone Asani", a name given by Sri Lanka. The cyclone is likely to move northwards via Odisha and West Bengal and hit Satkhira in Bangladesh, said the state minister.

The government is taking all-out preparation

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Alilur Rahman passes away

Alilur Rahman (Alzal), chairman of Hotel Purbani International, passed away at a hospital in Bangkok on Wednesday. He was 72.



His first janaza will be held today at Dhanmondhi's Taqwa Mosque after Asr prayers and the second one at Hotel Purbani.

Farouq Hossain's death anniversary

Today is the first death anniversary of Md Farouq Hossain, executive director of Hotel Eastern Residence and a social activist, said a press release.



Eid returns with due

FROM PAGE 5
Many people visited Chandrima Udayan Lake to room in the open air with their family, amidst the greenery and the red of the Krishnachura.

Preparing to face

FROM PAGE 3
The pressure may lose its strength in the sea," said Hafizur Rahman, a meteorologist of BMD.

5 members

FROM PAGE 3
The university paid the company Tk 500 crore for 8,250 decimals of land in 2016.

including Cox's Bazar, Kuakata sea beach, Sylhet's Jafong, Bichhanakandi and Tanguar Haor, and Patenga in Chattogram, saw a huge crowd of people looking for a getaway and some quality time with their families and friends during the Eid holidays.

over the Bay of Bengal as a cyclonic circulation over South Andaman Sea and neighbourhood persisted and could result in a depression with a wind speed of up to 75km per hour by May 8.

the education ministry, the board of trustees illegally paid Tk 303.82 crore extra for the development of the campus on the 9096.88 decimals of land," reads the statement.

Dhaka, Delhi to work together

FROM PAGE 3
Prof Sudharshan DS Seneviratne as part of Bangladesh's decision to donate medical supplies as gifts worth Tk 20 crore to Sri Lanka that is facing one of the worst financial crises ever.

MEDICAL ASSISTANCE TO SRI LANKA
State-owned company - Essential Drugs Company Limited (EDCL), and Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (BAPI) contributed medicines worth Tk 10 crore each for the donation to Sri Lanka.

Bilateral relations at risk

FROM PAGE 3
it to search for alternative funding for Akhaura-Sylhet and Joydebpur-Ishwardi projects, following the directives of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, officials said.

CHINESE EMBASSY'S STATEMENTS
On April 10, the Chinese ambassador sent a letter to Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, and copies to Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan and ERD Secretary Fatima Yasmin.

essential than ever before in this trying time. The dual impacts of Covid-19 pandemic, its resultant supply-chain disruption and the war between Russia and Ukraine have distorted the global economy, he said.

construction costs and time, which is undesirable for both sides, it mentioned. Considering the particular geopolitical conditions and surrounding environment of this project, both sides believe that the cost was reasonable and competitive with similar railway projects, reads the letter.

Death anniv of Quazi Nooruzzaman

CITY DESK
Today marks the 11th death anniversary of Lt Col (ret'd) Quazi Nooruzzaman, Bir Uttam.



reduce costs and whether they informed railway about their decision. But the railways ministry did not reply, rather it sent the revised pre-development project proposal to ERD in February this year, seeking alternative funding for the project.

Padma Bridge

FROM PAGE 3
illness. I couldn't offer prayers at the graves of my parents. Now I am happy as I offered prayers and met the people of my area.

Death anniv of Quazi Nooruzzaman

CITY DESK
Today marks the 11th death anniversary of Lt Col (ret'd) Quazi Nooruzzaman, Bir Uttam.

This movement led to him being jailed by the then dictator General Ershad. He was one of the primary founders and organisers of Ekattorer Ghatok Dalal Nirmul Committee and was one of the 24 accused by the state for holding the Gono Adalat (people's court) to try the war criminals and collaborators.

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University of Asia Pacific UAP
74/A, Green Road, Dhaka-1205
VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENT
Applications are invited for the following faculty positions at University of Asia Pacific:

Death

FROM PAGE 3
to death in a case, its judgment is examined by the HC through hearing arguments for confirmation of the death sentence.

Ananta was killed on May 12, 2015 near his Subidbazar residence in Sylhet when he was on his way to work along with his sister. Banned militant outfit Ansarullah Bangla Team (ABT) claimed responsibility for the murder.

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In the last two years, Eid seemed to have lost its lustre due to the pandemic. But as the Covid-19 situation has considerably improved, people flocked to their local attractions -- like Kuakata beach, the capital's Hatirjheel and national zoo -- in droves this Eid.

PHOTO: TITU DAS, ANISUR RAHMAN

Eid returns with due fervour

DIPAN NANDY

Due to the pandemic, Eid celebrations saw little fervour in the last two years. The religious festival finally regained its ardour this year, with the capital's residents flocking to various centres of entertainment.

The crowd was the same till yesterday.

The national zoo saw the biggest crowd, with visitors coming from across the capital.

The authorities claim that about 2,50,000 visitors came to the zoo from Tuesday to Thursday.

This correspondent visited the zoo on Wednesday and found a huge crowd of visitors.

Ananyo, who came to the zoo from Khulna on Wednesday with his mother and younger sister, said this was their first Eid in Dhaka.

"I won't come to the zoo in the next Eid holidays. I'll come back only when there is less crowd," he said.

Abul Hasnat, a resident of the capital's Uttara, said, "I entered the zoo with great difficulty. If there was less crowd, the visit would have been nicer."

Mujibur Rahman, curator of Bangladesh National Zoo, told this correspondent that the

SEE PAGE 4 COL 2

Man held for throwing acid on woman

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

Police arrested a youth for throwing acid on a 20-year-old woman in Rangunia, Chattogram early yesterday.

With burns on many parts of her body, the victim was undergoing treatment at the Burn and Plastic Surgery unit of Chattogram Medical College Hospital, said police.

The law enforcers arrested Nurul Azim (28), a CNG-run auto-rickshaw driver, from Kaptai area, said Rangunia Police Station Sub-inspector (SI) Prakash Chandra Sarkar while talking to The Daily Star.

The SI said Azim developed a relationship with the girl, who recently passed the HSC exams. Azim also hid his personal information from her, added the SI.

When she came to know that he has a wife and two sons, she did not want to continue the relationship, said Prakash.

On Wednesday night, she refused to meet Azim in Betagi area of Rangunia, leading to the acid attack, said the police officer.

"She suffered burn injuries to her face, hand and back," said the police official.

The victim's brother filed a case in this connection and Azim was arrested following the lawsuit, he added.

23.5mm rainfall submerges port city



Heavy rain coupled with tidal surge waterlogged many of the port city streets yesterday. This photo was taken from Sholoshohor Gate 2 area.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

ARUN BIKASH DEY, Ctg

Residents of Chattogram city, especially office-goers, had to endure flooded streets yesterday, on the first working day after Eid-ul-Fitr, following torrential rain in Chattogram city since morning.

Low-lying areas went under knee- to waist-deep water due to heavy rain coupled with tidal surge.

Contacted, Sheikh Farid Ahmed, an officer of Chattogram Met Office, said they recorded 23.5 mm rainfall in 24 hours till 12:00pm yesterday. The met office forecasted more rain in the next 24 hours, he said.

Those who started for office suffered the most, as they had to wade through filthy water overflowing from roadside drains.

"We had to suffer due to waterlogging on Eid day last year... the same thing happened on the third day of Eid this year," said Imtiaz Ahmed, a resident of Shulak Bahar area, who was going to the office in the morning. "I failed to hail a

rickshaw or other vehicle, and so, I'm walking through this dirty water."

Many areas, including Muradpur, Sholoshohor Gate 2, Kapasgola, Chawkbazar, DC Road, KB Aman Ali Road in West Bakalia, Chandgaon, Halishahar and Agrabad, went under knee- to waist-deep water.

Minhaj Uddin, a resident of Rahattarpool area, said, "Dirty water from the drain is overflowing onto the road, as the staffers concerned from Chattogram City Corporation (CCC) didn't clean the drains."

"We suffer every year in the rainy season due to waterlogging, but no effective initiative has been taken by CCC to address it," he added.

Echoing the same, Jamal Uddin, a resident of West Bakalia's DC Road, said the dirty water not only flooded the roads but also entered his house, which marred the family's Eid celebrations.

CCC Mayor Rezaul Karim Chowdhury could not be reached for comments despite repeated attempts. Ehebulli ssentisus omnerra

Lightning kills 3 teens on Eid day

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Three teenagers were killed and two others injured in a lightning strike in Tangail's Kalihati upazila on the day of Eid-ul-Fitr on Tuesday.

The incident took place in Hatia area under Dashkia union in the morning.

The deceased were identified as Arif (15), son of Rabiul from Hatia area; Rafiq (14), son of Abdur Razzak; and Faisal (18), son of Julhas from Dashkia Purbapara village, said police.

Malek Bhuiyan, chairman of Dashkia Union Parishad, said, "They went there to bathe in the New Dhaleswari river in the morning before the Eid prayers."

Arif died on the spot, he added.

The other victims were taken to Tangail General Hospital where on-duty doctors declared Rafiq and Faisal dead.

The bodies were handed over to the family members.

Lightning strike is quite common in Bangladesh.

However, to avert this major disaster, experts suggest avoiding open and high places, staying away from tall trees and electric poles, not going near windows, refraining from touching metal parts of a building, and avoiding staying barefoot or using wet leather shoes, among other precautions.

Tourists assaulted by volunteers in Jaflong, 5 held

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Volunteers appointed by the Gowainghat administration assaulted a group of tourists at Jaflong, a popular tourist destination in Sylhet. The incident occurred in front of the ticket counter around 2:00pm yesterday.

After the incident, five persons -- Laxman Chandra Das, Md Selim Ahmed, Sohel Rana, Nazim Uddin and Joyanal Abedin -- have been detained by Gowainghat police, said Officer-in-Charge of Gowainghat Police Station KM Nazrul Islam.

Several videos of the incident have already gone viral on social media.

In the videos, three men in blue uniform -- with "volunteer" written on them -- are seen beating up a group of tourists with sticks. Some women, from the same group of tourists, were also attacked when they tried to save them.

Confirming the incident, Upazila Executive Officer of Gowainghat Md Tahmilur Rahman said, "When the group of tourists wanted to enter Jaflong area without tickets and faced resistance, they started arguing with the volunteers at the ticket counter. At one point, the volunteers attacked the tourists."

"This incident is very shocking and it will cause huge loss to the local tourism sector. Since the attackers are volunteers employed by us, I take the responsibility. We have already suspended three volunteers and asked local police to take legal action against them," he said.

In-charge of Tourist Police in Jaflong, Md Ratan Sheikh, said, "Soon after learning about the incident, one of our teams went to the spot. This happened when we were busy, as a tourist had gone missing after falling into the waters at Jaflong."

Md Lutfur Rahman, additional superintendent of Sylhet District Police, said they have deployed sufficient police at the tourist spot to ensure tourist safety.

Meanwhile, the district administration has decided to waive entry fee for the next seven days from Thursday, said Sylhet's Deputy Commissioner Md Mozibur Rahman.

No colours in the chars

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Mobarak Ali (67) is a farmer from Char Gobordhan area on the Teesta river bed in Lalmonirhat.

While Eid is supposed to bring renewed hope and happiness for everyone, that was not the case for him and the families of his two sons. On the morning of Eid, he woke up to the cries of his four grandchildren. They did not get any new clothes for the occasion, thanks to untimely floods and storms damaging their crops.

Mobarak and his sons, whose sole source of income is farming, took a loan to plant various crops, including paddy and maize, on their lands. However, all the crops were left to ruin, driving the family to further poverty.

"My wife and I don't mind not getting new clothes. Only last year we were so happy during Eid. I cannot stand the tears of my grandchildren," said Mobarak.

"Eid has made its due arrival like every year, but there is no joy for us on this occasion. We don't even have the means



to arrange food for Eid. I only said my prayers at the local Eidgah field. That was the extent of the celebration in our household," he added.

Like Mobarak, all farmers of the said char passed Eid in distress. Nazim Ali, 58, a farmer at Char Sardob of the Dharla river basin, said only a few people got new clothes and good food but for the most, the occasion had nothing in store.

The situations were similar in the Dudhkumar and Gangadhar river basins as well, where the colours of the festivities did not touch people's lives. Their Eid was one afflicted with poverty and devoid of new clothes, good food or anything that represents a celebration.



As the holidays have come to an end, those who went to their village homes are coming back to the capital. And so, the now quiet Dhaka will once again be bustling with people. This photo was taken yesterday from Kamalapur Railway Station.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN



Siam Ahmed and Puja Chery with fans during 'Shaan' promotions.



'Ityadi' remains a must-watch for television buffs during Eid.

PHOTOS: COLLECTED

EID BREATHES LIFE into entertainment industry

While cinema halls saw a much-needed influx of people, social media news feeds were graced by celebrities in their beautiful Eid attires. The world of entertainment, which lived under the shadow of a global pandemic, finally seemed to come alive this Eid. The happiness, ever so contagious, spread across all avenues.

SADI MOHAMMAD SHAHNEWAZ

'Shaandar' Shaan, 'Golui' not far behind Siam Ahmed and Puja Chery starrer "Shaan" is the talk of the town, bringing back audiences to cinemas in waves. Having released in 35 halls across the country, the team of the M Rahim directorial is on a mission to grace halls and the fans personally. "Not just 'Shaan', but I hope all films do well, for the sake of our industry," said Siam to The Daily Star.

On the other hand, "Golui", featuring Shakib Khan and Puja Chery, released in 29 halls, is doing well too. Shakib Khan, who is currently in the USA, is eagerly looking for updates on his film. "Bidrohi", starring Shakib and Bubly, is also attracting viewers.



Popular actresses in their Eid attires.

Coke Studio continues serenading as 'Guru' returns

In its fourth release, Coke Studio Bangla presented a banger of a track, as the mysticism of Lalon bumped lists with high-energy rap. Sumi, the vocalist of Band Lalon, presented a fantastic rendition of

"Pagol Chara Duniya Chole Na", while rap crew Jalali Set made their much-anticipated return with their high-octane performance. The glass of Coke is truly getting more chilled by the second.

On 'Chaad Raat', legendary rockstar James released "I Love You", his first original after over a decade. While fan opinions



remain divided on the song, the fact that the rock 'Guru' has returned to create more originals is surely welcome.

Television clings to tradition, while OTT innovates

Watching television on Eid is a tradition, with shows like "Ityadi" still remaining a must-watch every year. Many theatrically released films were also telecast this year, with "No Dorai", "Gondi", "Dhaka Dream" and "Laal Morogor Jhuti" seeing successful premieres. Telefilms and special projects featuring Afran Nisho, Apurba, Mehasabien and Tanjin Tisha, among others, fared well.

However, stars tended to drift towards OTT and digital platforms. Bongo BOB released "Chol", the first ever interactive web series in the country. It featured Yash Rohan and Sabila Nur as the leads. "I focused on



Chirkutt lands in the USA for their show at Madison Square Garden.

OTT this Eid", said Afran Nisho to The Daily Star. "Be it the cinematography, the narrative style, or the overall editing and colour grading, OTT productions offer more for the audience to relish on."

Chirkutt to perform at Madison Square Garden today

Folk fusion band Chirkutt will make history, as they will perform alongside legendary band Scorpions at Madison Square Garden today. The band posted a picture on social media, after landing in New York. "We are proud to represent this country in the world's most famous arena, and we hope that more local bands will follow suit," said the band's vocalist, Sharmin Sultana Sumi, to The Daily Star.

Leading ladies take over the internet in traditional attires

Photos of actresses wishing 'Eid Mubarak' in stunning traditional attires were arguably the grace that the festival needed.

The men were not far behind though, but often tended to re-use older pictures for the same greetings, which takes points off their Eid-o-meter!

SATYAJIT RAY'S 'Pratidwandi' on special screening at 75th Cannes Film Festival

ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT DESK

Marking the 75th year of India's Independence and the Cannes International Film Festival, there will be a special screening of legendary filmmaker Satyajit Ray's "Pratidwandi" at the festival. India will be the "Country of Honour" and Deepika Padukone will serve as one of the jury board members at the event.

"Pratidwandi", which was released in 1970, has been digitalised and will be premiered at the prestigious festival. It is the first film from the "Kolkata Troyee" trilogy of Ray. It stars Dhritiman Chatterjee, Kalyan Chatterjee, Soumitra Chatterjee, and Anindita Chatterjee among others.

The Cannes International Film Festival will run from May 17 to 28.



'Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness' arrives in Star Cineplex today



The much-anticipated Marvel Studios film, "Doctor Strange in the Multiverse of Madness", releases at Star Cineplex today. Directed by Sam Raimi, the film stars Benedict Cumberbatch, Elizabeth Olsen, and Chiwetel Ejiofor, among others.

In the film, Dr Stephen Strange casts a forbidden spell that opens the doorway to the multiverse, including alternate versions of himself, whose threat to humanity is too great for the combined forces of Strange, Wong, and

Wanda Maximoff. Tickets for the first screening of the film have been sold out at all branches of Star Cineplex.

COUNTRYWIDE

BRICKFIELDS NEAR FARMLAND

Farmers facing challenges in crop production

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

Many farmers in Biral upazila have been facing enormous challenges in producing quality crops in their farmlands due to emission of toxic gas from two surrounding brick kilns.

Affected farmers said toxic gas released from two nearby brickfields has been damaging their crops in around 200 bighas of land as well as causing health hazards for local people for the last four years.

They said not only paddy, but other seasonal fruit orchards, including lemon, banana, mango and litchi, are also badly damaged this year.

The two brick kilns—JBM Bricks and SKB Bricks—located at Rajuria village in the upazila have been running their operations for last 19 years.

Although local administration had shut those brickfields in the past for not meeting their requirements, the unscrupulous businessmen returned again and resumed operations once again, affected farmers said.

Farmers alleged that for the last four years they have been counting huge loss as almost all their crops were damaged due to release of toxic gas from the two brickfields.

The damages were extensively high in 2018 and this season, they added.

On April 17, about 50 affected farmers submitted written complaints to Biral Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) and Upazila Agricultural Officer (UAO), seeking their intervention, but they are yet to take any necessary step in this regard.

In their complaint, farmers alleged that Farhad Hossain and Shafiqul Islam, owners of the two brickfields, have been using tyres and tree logs as fuel instead of coal for burning bricks.

The toxic fume released from both the brick kilns is not only damaging farmers' cash crops, it also causing serious threat to public health for long.

Ashrafur Islam, one of the affected farmers, alleged that orchards of different seasonal fruits, including mango, litchi,

lemon and banana, of 10 farmers on 50 bighas have been completely damaged this year due to release of toxic gas from the adjacent brick kilns.

Moreover, paddy on 30 bighas was also damaged, he said.

Ashrafur said he cut down his mango trees on 6 bighas in 2018 as those died due to toxic gas emitted from the brick kilns.

He later planted lemon trees on 4 bighas, but his entire orchard got damaged again this year.

Despite repeated attempts this correspondent could not reach Biral UNO Afsana Kawsar for his comments in this regard.

Biral UAO Mostafa Hasan Imam said they are planning to assess the affected area.

When asked, Farhad Hossain, owner of JBM Bricks, said every problem has a solution.

According to Dinajpur Department of Environment (DoE), there are 270 brick kilns in the district.

Of those, only 76 have clearance certificates.



Tyres and tree logs are being used as fuel for burning bricks at two brick kilns in Dinajpur's Biral upazila.

PHOTO: STAR

LPG price

FROM PAGE 12
be selling for Tk 1,335 including value-added tax, down by Tk 104 from last month.

The new price will be applicable rationally for other cylinders ranging from 5 kgs to 45 kgs, said BERC Chairman Abdul Jalil while announcing the new price.

The BERC also lowered the rate of autogas price to Tk 62.21 per litre from Tk 67.02 for motor vehicles.

The price of LPG marketed by the state-owned LP Gas Company will stay unchanged.

LP Gas accounts for less than 5 percent of the \$27 billion market for LPG, progressively becoming the fuel of choice for cooking and running vehicles.

On April 12 last year, the BERC for the first time fixed the retail-level LPG prices.

No Eid

FROM PAGE 12
year, up from \$24.7 billion received in fiscal 2020-21.

Let alone hitting that number, it is unlikely that last fiscal year's receipts would be bested.

The sliding remittance inflows coupled with the surge in imports have put pressure on the balance of payment and the country's foreign exchange reserves.

The foreign currency reserves are hovering around the \$44 billion-mark, down from about \$46 billion in the earlier part of the fiscal year.

Between July last year and March this year, about 7 lakh Bangladeshis left for jobs abroad, according to data from the Bureau of Manpower, Employment and Training.

Largely hassle-free, yet 40 die

FROM PAGE 12
increase monitoring today and tomorrow when a huge number of people are likely to return Dhaka.

BIKES, THREE-WHEELERS
In Rangpur, at least five people were killed when a microbus collided head-on with a locally-made three-wheeler at Soleyshah Bazar on Rangpur-Dinajpur highway on Wednesday.

The microbus, heading for Saidpur of Nilphamari from Rangpur, crashed into the three-wheeler around 7:00pm, leaving three people, including a couple, dead on the spot.

Locals rushed the others to Rangpur Medical College Hospital where two more died.

Dulal Hossain, officer-in-charge of Gangachara Police Station, said all the victims were in the three

wheeler.

The microbus driver fled the scene.

In Joypurhat, four people were killed in three accidents on Saturday and Thursday.

According to police, Shimul and Shanto were on a bike. When the bike reached Purnapool of Joypurhat-Hili Road, it hit a roadside tree, leaving Shimul dead on the spot. Doctors declared Shanto dead at a Bogura hospital.

Two others in the district died in road crashes involving three-wheelers.

In Dinajpur, four people were killed road in crashes involving bikes and three-wheelers yesterday.

In Sirajganj, three people were killed and five others injured in bike and three-wheeler accidents on Eid day.

In Pabna, three people

were killed and two injured in two crashes involving bikes, three-wheelers and a truck on Wednesday and yesterday.

In Tangail, two bikers were killed and another injured on Tuesday.

In Cumilla, six people were killed in four accidents between Eid day and yesterday. Bikes, three-wheelers and cars were involved in those.

In Fakirhat of Bagerhat, three people were killed and 15 others injured in a head-on collision between a bus and a truck on Sunday.

The dead included the two drivers and a 10-month-old child, locals said.

Four people were killed in Dhaka, two each in Mymensingh and Barishal, and one each in Magura and Cox's Bazar.

It's malicious, unacceptable

FROM PAGE 1
Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last year that contained objectionable statements," he said.

The minister was speaking at a press briefing at his home in the port city's Dewanzi Pukur Par.

Hasan said the RSF also ran untrue and fabricated reports on Bangladesh's media. The country's journalist unions protested their reports that time, he said, adding that even some Bangladeshi expatriates in France sent a legal notice to the organisation through a lawyer.

He said the legal notice mentioned that RSF could not make such statements against any country or head of the government as per the law of France.

They did this by violating French law. So, the report on Bangladesh's ranking is not acceptable in any way, said Hasan, also that joint

general secretary of Awami League.

The minister said the RSF, also known as Reporters Without Borders, collected data and information from those who are spreading propaganda against the country abroad. The report is of no value and the organisation is publishing reports against Bangladesh continuously with an ill intention, he added.

Hasan said the RSF has also talked about the Digital Security Act. There was no need of such a law when the issue of digital systems did not exist, he told reporters.

The minister said such law exists not only in Bangladesh, but also in many other countries, including neighbouring India and Pakistan, Singapore, Australia, and the USA.

He said everyone should remain alert so that none can misuse the law.

Covid

FROM PAGE 12
coronavirus spread beyond China.

Countries around the world reported 5.42 million Covid-19 deaths to the WHO in 2020 and 2021—a figure that today stands at 6.24 million, including deaths in 2022.

The Geneva-based organisation has long said the true number of deaths would be far higher than just the recorded fatalities put down to Covid infections.

Deaths linked indirectly to the pandemic are attributable to other conditions for which people were unable to access treatment because health systems were overburdened by the crisis.

'Pro-US' and 'confrontational'

N Korea slams South's new leader, fires ballistic missile

REUTERS, Seoul

A major North Korean propaganda website yesterday denounced South Korea's incoming president Yoon Suk-yeol, who has vowed to take a tougher line on weapons tests by Pyongyang, describing him as "pro-United States", and "confrontational".

The North's state media have yet to make formal comments on Yoon, a conservative who is set to take office on May 10, but the website Uriminzokkiri issued scathing criticism ahead of his inauguration.

"Yoon Suk-yeol had aroused shock with such preposterous remarks as 'preemptive strike' and 'main enemy,' and stirred up confrontational madness trumpeting a 'stronger South Korea-US alliance,'" it said.

It was referring to comments by Yoon that he would allow a pre-emptive strike on North Korea if signs of attack were imminent, and his description of the neighbouring nation as a "main enemy".

That description of the North has been shunned by outgoing progressive President Moon Jae-in, who had sought to improve relations.

North Korea fired a ballistic missile toward the sea off its east coast on Wednesday, South Korea and Japan said, about a week after Pyongyang vowed to develop its nuclear forces "at the fastest possible speed".

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) said it detected the launch at about noon in the Sunan area of the North's capital of Pyongyang, home to an international airport and the area from which the North said it had fired its largest intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), the Hwasong-17, on March 24.



PHOTO: REUTERS

Israeli security forces detain a protester at the compound that houses Al-Aqsa Mosque, known to Muslims as Noble Sanctuary and to Jews as Temple Mount, in Jerusalem's Old City yesterday. The police said they had repelled "dozens of rioters" who had been "throwing stones and other objects" at the security forces.

Why EU may find it tough to squeeze out Russian oil

REUTERS, London

The European Union has proposed a phased embargo of Russian oil but may find it tricky to implement, given Europe's complex distribution network and challenges in tracking crude once it is blended or refined. The plan, if agreed by member states, would take effect in six months for crude, and in eight months for diesel and other oil products.

HOW WATERTIGHT WILL ANY EU SANCTIONS BE?

Under the proposal, Hungary and Slovakia would be granted a longer period - until the end of 2023 - to adapt to the embargo. This means that countries in the EU would still be able to purchase Russian oil via Hungary and Slovakia, unless the plan is ratified to prevent both countries from buying more oil than they need.

European countries might still continue buying Russian cargoes from other third countries without being aware of its origin. Oil can usually be traced to its origin based on its chemical make up, such as sulphur content and density. However, some buyers have been deceived in the past by forged documents, hiding the origin of cargoes from countries under sanctions, including Iran and Venezuela, according to industry sources.

RUSSIAN OIL PURCHASES

At least 26 major European refiners and trading companies have suspended spot purchases or intend to phase out a combined 2.1 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian imports, according to JP Morgan. European companies including Shell, Repsol, BP, and TTEF, PA, Repsol, REP, MC and BP, BP, L no longer buy any refined products with Russian content. And BP's contracts state any deal with a seller that violates its policy will be invalid, according to trade information detailed in the Platts



trading window.

CARGOES OF RUSSIAN OIL

Even with all those documents in place, there is no guarantee of eliminating any traces of Russian hydrocarbons once it enters the EU's main oil importing hub, the Amsterdam-Rotterdam-Antwerp (ARA) complex - made up of eight ports spread across two countries, 96 terminals, and 6,300 storage tanks owned by hundreds of international oil companies. "Some products processed in European refineries will continue to contain Russian oil," Shell says. In ARA, the blended Russian oil may show up in customs data simply as fuel from the Netherlands, said Cuneyt Kazokoglu, head of oil demand analysis at FGE.

WHERE DOES THE OIL GO?

Fuel can be loaded onto cargoes and re-exported to other regions and countries. It can go by barge to other terminals within the same port, or head down the Rhine river to Switzerland, France and Germany. This can hide the fuel's origin, traders said. From the ARA hub, oil products can be distributed through Nato's Central European Pipeline System (CEPS), which links to six maritime ports and 11 refineries across the continent, three rail and 16 truck-loading stations,

and six international airports.

Buyers are increasingly requesting breakdowns on the origin of blended oil from storage sites, industry sources said, to make their own decision on whether they can accept it. But fully traceable origin documentation is not always readily available in a reasonable time frame before a deal takes place.

Some shipping charterers provide a certificate detailing where fuel was produced or processed. While a country's customs authority would have access to that data with imported cargoes, the documents are considered confidential.

Shell previously classified goods of Russian origin as those with 50% or more of their content from fuel produced in Russia. But the firm recently tightened its restrictions on buying Russian oil, saying it would no longer accept refined products with Russian content, including blended fuels, according to clauses in its trading contracts.

The restriction, however, only applies to platforms where companies are allowed to insert their own clauses, and would exclude the gasoil contract on the major ICE exchange, one source familiar with the matter said.

India's J&K gets redrawn constituencies

REUTERS, New Delhi

India yesterday published a new list of redrawn political constituencies for the former state of Jammu and Kashmir (J&K), giving greater representation to the Muslim-majority region's Hindu areas and paving the way for fresh elections.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government broke up J&K into two federal territories in 2019 as part of a move to tighten its grip over the region, which is at the heart of more than 70 years of hostility between India and Pakistan.

Anticipating protests in a region fighting Indian rule for decades, the government put many political leaders under house arrest and cut off internet connections when it announced the move to split the state.

J&K originally comprised the mainly Muslim Kashmir Valley - the bone of contention between nuclear-armed India and Pakistan - the Hindu-dominated Jammu region, and the remote Buddhist enclave of Ladakh.

The government said a delimitation commission had finalised 90 assembly constituencies for J&K, excluding Ladakh, with 43 seats for Jammu and 47 for Kashmir. Earlier, Jammu had 37 seats and the Kashmir valley 46.

The commission said it had been difficult to accommodate competing claims from various sides, citing in a statement the region's "peculiar geo-cultural landscape". Indian Home Minister Amit Shah said in January that elections would be held in J&K soon after the delimitation process was completed.

5-YEAR JAIL SENTENCE Myanmar junta court rejects Suu Kyi appeal

REUTERS



The Supreme Court in military-ruled Myanmar on Wednesday struck down an appeal from deposed leader Aung San Suu Kyi against a five-year jail sentence she was handed last week on corruption charges. "The appeal was summarily rejected," said a source with knowledge of the proceedings, adding that the court dismissed the appeal as soon as it was lodged without hearing arguments

from either side. The Nobel laureate had been found guilty last week, in the first of 11 corruption cases brought against her. She has been under house arrest on charges ranging from corruption to treason, and potentially carrying a combined sentence of 190 years.

HEAVY RAINS, FLOODS 22 killed, 40 hurt in Afghanistan

REUTERS, Kabul

Heavy rain and flooding has killed 22 people, destroyed hundreds of homes and damaged crops in Afghanistan, which is already facing a humanitarian crisis, a disaster management official said yesterday. The Taliban government, struggling to cope with the disaster that has affected more than a third of its provinces, will approach international relief organisations for help, officials said. "Due to flooding and storms in 12 provinces, 22 people have died and 40 injured," said Hassibullah Shekhani, head of communications and information at Afghanistan's National Disaster Management Authority. The rain and flooding was particularly severe in the western provinces of Badghis and Faryab and the northern province of Baghlan, en suffering from drought in recent years, made worse by climate change, with low crop yields raising fears of serious food shortages.

'FOREIGN CONSPIRACY' Pakistan to form inquiry commission

DAWN ONLINE

Pakistan's Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb announced yesterday that the government had decided to form an "independent" inquiry commission to probe the alleged "foreign conspiracy" that former prime minister Imran Khan has been claiming was behind the ouster of his government.

The minister told a press conference in Islamabad that the commission will "fairly decide that the narrative of foreign conspiracy was all drama and the real character behind it was Imran Khan". "These allegations are an attempt to cause irreparable damage to the country," the information minister said.

Three more Bangladeshis

FROM PAGE 1 The Daily Star contacted Saifullah but to no avail. His phone was switched off immediately after.

Hong Kong is a popular tax haven because it does not tax income earned beyond its borders. It is illegal under Bangladeshi law for citizens to park their money abroad.

When Pandora Papers were first leaked last year, Ilshin had issued a statement claiming they "do not solicit clients for tax avoidance purpose" and that Hong Kong does not "provide a safe harbour for those non-resident persons (individuals and corporations) seeking tax avoidance".

The other Bangladeshi name in the trove released on Tuesday is Shaheda Begum Shanti, whose name came up in the records of SFM Corporate Services, a UAE-based firm that has billed itself as "the world's number one offshore company formation provider". Shanti's name was linked to Jas Limited, an offshore company registered in Seychelles. The address in SFM's

record for Shanti is one in Shahjalal Uposhohor on the outskirts of Sylhet. She is a shareholder at Baraka Power, where her husband Robin Chowdhury is a director and a majority shareholder, according to its company secretary Saiful Islam Chowdhury. However, he was unable to confirm Shanti's involvement in the offshore company. "Robin Chowdhury is currently abroad, so it would not be possible to communicate with them," he told The Daily Star.

First published on October 3 last year, Pandora Papers is the largest data leak detailing the financial affairs of the global elite. Earlier in the year, the Bangladesh Financial Intelligence Unit and the Anti-Corruption Commission had submitted the names of 69 individuals and organisations to the High Court for a decision. The issue is still pending.

A total of 98 Bangladeshi nationals and individuals linked to Bangladesh have been named by ICIJ in its successive leaks over the years. At a public meeting in Siliguri, Amit Shah accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of "spreading rumours" that the new citizenship law would not be enforced. "I have come to North Bengal today. I want to make it clear that the Trinamool Congress is spreading rumours that the CAA will not be implemented. I want to say that as soon as the Covid wave abates we will implement CAA on the ground," Amit Shah said.

without the court's permission." He also said they would raise the issue before the court. In 2008, a Dhaka court convicted Salim of corruption and sentenced him to 10 years in jail with a Tk 10 lakh fine in the case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission. The ACC accused the lawmaker of accumulating

wealth worth Tk 14.65 crore beyond known sources of his income. On March 9 last year, the High Court upheld a lower court's verdict that convicted and sentenced Haji Salim to 10 years. The full verdict was released on February 10 and the High Court directed him to surrender before the Dhaka Special Judge's Court-7 within 30

days of receiving a copy of the verdict. If he fails to do so within the given time, the Dhaka court can issue an arrest warrant for him, said the HC. According to his counsel Sayeed Ahmed Raza, the lawmaker received the copy of the full verdict, and the 30-day period will be over on May 24. Haji Salim might

surrender to the trial court and appeal before the Supreme for bail on May 16, added the lawyer.

There is also a debate over his parliament membership as, according to the constitution, he should have lost it following the HC verdict. Article 66 of the constitution reads: "A person shall be disqualified for election as, or for being, a member of parliament who has been, on conviction for a criminal offence involving moral turpitude, sentenced to imprisonment for a term of not less than two years, unless a period of five years has elapsed since his release." But the matter is still pending and he continues to hold the parliament membership.

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Will implement CAA once Covid is over Says India's home minister

NDTV ONLINE

The Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) will be implemented as soon as Covid tapers off, India's Union Home Minister Amit Shah said yesterday.

At a public meeting in Siliguri, Amit Shah accused West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee of "spreading rumours" that the new citizenship law would not be enforced. "I have come to North Bengal today. I want to make it clear that the Trinamool Congress is spreading rumours that the CAA will not be implemented. I want to say that as soon as the Covid wave abates we will implement CAA on the ground," Amit Shah said.

The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

Journalism can't thrive under digital siege

Bangladesh's continued slide in Press Freedom Index is alarming

WE'RE deeply worried about the total lack of concern being shown to the continued slide in the state of press freedom, and generally the freedom of expression, in Bangladesh. This has been reflected, most recently, in the 2022 World Press Freedom Index released by Reporters Without Borders on the occasion of World Press Freedom Day on May 3. Bangladesh, unsurprisingly and quite in keeping with its record over the past decade, has put up a dismal performance as it ranked 162nd out of 180 countries and territories. This marks a 10-point slide from last year, when Bangladesh ranked 152nd, while its score—36.63—is the lowest among all South Asian countries. While this is more or less predictable by now, there are important takeaways from our latest showing, including how social media has replaced traditional media as the new frontier of censorship and journalist repression.

The role of social media in endangering journalists—which has been recognised in this year's Press Freedom Day theme of "Journalism Under Digital Siege"—cannot be emphasised enough. To that end, Bangladesh offers a "successful" template. Between January 2020 and February 2022, more than 200 journalists have been implicated under the Digital Security Act (DSA). There have been instances of involuntary disappearance and pretrial detention as well. Editors and media managers have repeatedly blamed the authorities for weaponising the DSA to turn the heat on journalists, so that they are forced to toe the official line. The problem is, DSA doesn't need to be weaponised—it is the weapon. It's replete with vague terms. Most of its sections are also non-bailable, which means the accused, as guilty until proven innocent, faces an uneven road to justice. Few of those sued under the law have been convicted, however, indicating that the main purpose of this law is not to judge, but to intimidate. In other words, a culture of fear has been created through this law.

Bangladesh's score in the Press Freedom Index was 57 in 2011. In 2022, it stands at 36.63. Bangladesh's score in the democracy index was 60 in 2011. In 2022, it stands at 39. Clearly, our slide in press freedom and democracy has been simultaneous, and we cannot expect improvements in either if the authorities are not respectful of people's voices and fundamental rights. Unfortunately, instead of trying to improve our scores in these vital indexes, the authorities have recently drafted new laws to regulate personal data, mass media, social media and over-the-top (OTT) media services which, if enacted, will put journalists, critics and rights defenders at a greater risk. We urge the authorities to turn away from this dangerous road, and take measures that actually empower the journalists both in the digital sphere and in their professions on the ground.

Exploitation of shipbreaking workers must stop

Why didn't they get Eid bonuses?

WE share the disappointment of thousands of shipbreaking workers who were denied their festival bonus before Eid-ul-Fitr this year. As per our report, shipyard owners used a loophole in the labour law of Bangladesh to deprive the workers of their festival bonuses. A provision in the law specifies that festival bonuses cannot exceed the basic salary of the workers who worked for one year at any yard. The law, however, doesn't mention a lower limit for the bonus. So, the yard owners gave some of the workers Tk 500 and some Tk 1,000 as Eid bonuses, while many went home empty-handed. The same thing happened last year as well, according to the workers. Meanwhile, they paid the full salary and bonus to the management and regular staff.

The reason why the owners could exploit the workers in such a shameful way is that they never implemented the minimum wage structure declared by the government. In 2016, the government fixed the minimum wage for shipbreaking workers (entry level) at Tk 16,000, making the basic salary Tk 8,000. But since none of the yards have implemented the new wage structure yet, it has also given them the chance to deprive the workers of their Eid bonuses. The result is, around 25,000 workers employed in this dangerous job could not enjoy their Eid holidays with their family members due to financial hardship.

Shipbreaking yards are, reportedly, the most dangerous workplaces in the country, due mostly to lax implementation of environmental and safety laws. Many workers in this sector have lost their lives in deadly workplace accidents, while injuries are also fairly common. While the workers risk their lives to do their work, the authorities of these yards remain oblivious to their safety and well-being. This is, in no way, acceptable in a civilised society.

The questions that must be asked here are: Why couldn't the yard owners implement the government-fixed wage structure in all these years? How could they ignore the fact that it is through the hard work of these workers that the industry is making such huge profits? Also, why is it so hard for them to ensure a safe work environment for the workers?

We think the government should take action against the yards that are not complying with the government-fixed wage structure. These yard owners should be directed to give their workers their due bonuses when they rejoin work after Eid holidays. The government must also have a monitoring mechanism in place to ensure that our shipyards are safe for workers. Without proper monitoring from the authorities, the industry may continue exploiting its workers.

Speak now or forever hold your tongue



Saad Hammadi is Amnesty International's South Asia Campaigner. His Twitter handle is @saadhammadi

SAAD HAMMADI

BETWEEN January 2020 and February 2022, more than 200 journalists have been implicated across Bangladesh under the draconian Digital Security Act (DSA), leading, in some cases, to involuntary disappearance and pretrial detention.

In August 2021, the Bangladesh Police told me that they were not required to reveal the number of cases they filed, or the number of people they accused or arrested for online dissent under the DSA at any given time. In response to my inquiry under the country's Right to Information Act, they argued that the public disclosure of such information could "obstruct enforcement of the law."

When information is denied to people and any attempt to expose truth by journalists is penalised by authorities, the state of freedom of expression in Bangladesh, including press freedom, is not hard to guess.

In February last year, writer Mushtaq Ahmed died in prison. He had been denied bail six times over a 10-month period and held without trial simply for criticising the government's response to Covid-19 online. Another inmate alleged that Ahmed had been subjected to torture. His case exposes how the DSA has been weaponised to cruelly target dissenting voices.

During a meeting of foreign correspondents in December last year, Law Minister Anisul Huq assured those in attendance that reporters would not be arrested immediately under the DSA when cases were filed against them. Instead, they would be summoned and could seek bail from the court. His assurance arrived amid severe criticism of the law. This means that the government can bypass the law on a whim or make exceptions in order to target certain groups of people. This unnerving suggestion promotes exceptionalism and suggests that the rule of law is flexible and will not be applied equally to everyone.

Just under two months later, state critic and journalist Zohurul Haque was arrested under the DSA, which showed that the authorities intend to use the law to target anyone who does not toe the party line. Under the pretext of combating disinformation, defamation and the "deterioration of law and order,"

the authorities have used the DSA to incarcerate journalists and cartoonists for months, many of whom are held without trial. Even children have been targeted.

According to the international human rights law, any restrictions placed on the right to freedom of expression must be necessary, proportionate and provided by laws to protect, for example, public health or national security. Using a criminal law

access private information in encrypted communications on personal devices, or to censor content on digital platforms.

This means that if someone expresses a critical view of the achievement of Bangladesh's Liberation War, or the country's relationship with another nation in a Facebook status, or even in a private message between friends on WhatsApp, that individual could be subjected to



▲ VISUAL: STAR

to combat disinformation and defamation clearly does not meet these standards.

Government policymakers remain adamant that the DSA can effectively address disinformation on digital platforms. Instead of breaking away from past acts of repression, the authorities have drafted new laws to regulate personal data, mass media, social media and over-the-top (OTT) media services like Netflix and other digital platforms. Human rights defenders, lawyers, journalists, academics, film-makers and civil society organisations all fear that these laws will be used, like the DSA, to target individuals or content deemed to be anti-state or anti-government.

The proposed Data Protection Act, for instance, gives authorities broad powers to access, control and process data without judicial oversight. This would make journalists and their sources vulnerable and would lead to heightened self-censorship as their information can be accessed by the authorities. The law would also exempt state agencies from being held accountable for violating people's right to privacy. Moreover, the authorities would use vague and overbroad descriptions, such as the need to protect the "spirit of Liberation War," "sovereignty of state" or "friendly relations with foreign states" to

criminal punishment under the DSA, intrusive surveillance under the data protection law, or censorship under the digital, social media and OTT platform regulations.

These laws and regulations are deeply problematic and clearly arbitrary in nature. To make the new laws fair and transparent, the authorities must broaden consultations to allow the concerns of numerous independent critics to be heard. Otherwise, many more individuals, including journalists, will continue to be punished under the DSA and the new laws for criticising powerful people and holding state institutions to account.

Bangladesh ranks at the bottom of the eight countries in South Asia, having slid from 146 in 2018 to 162 in 2022 on Reporters Without Borders' global press freedom index. The repression legitimised under the DSA, and the newly proposed laws signal an imminent deterioration of press freedom.

While the media and human rights and civil society organisations must play a role in lobbying for change, I hope politicians will also take concrete steps to critically and objectively review these laws, and ensure they fall in line with international human rights law and standards. It is, I am afraid, a case of now or never.

The authorities have used the Digital Security Act (DSA) under various pretexts to incarcerate journalists, cartoonists and critics for months, many of whom are held without trial.

PROJECT SYNDICATE

Europe's soft-power problem



Mark Leonard is the director of the European Council on Foreign Relations.

MARK LEONARD

THE Ukraine crisis shows that the European Union (EU) has a problem with power. While its hard-power deficit has recently moved to the centre of attention, its philosophical and political shortcomings are an even bigger concern. After all, given Germany's *Zeitenwende* (foreign-policy "turning point"), Finland and Sweden's debates over Nato membership, and the size of European rearmament spending pledges, Europe will likely have more military resources than anyone other than the US before too long. But even then, it will have a soft-power problem.

Europe is home to two identity-building projects, both of which are deeply alienating to the rest of the world. Each was represented in the second round of the French presidential election, where the incumbent, Emmanuel Macron, defeated the far-right nationalist Marine Le Pen to secure a second term.

Macron framed the campaign as a choice about what kind of civilisation France—and Europe—wants to be. He portrayed his country as the ultimate embodiment of enlightened civic virtue. For him (and for Europeans like myself), the European project is an elaborate attempt to transcend the continent's bloody history of nationalism, imperialism and genocide. The EU is meant to forge a new European identity based on civic principles such as international law (against "might makes right"), liberal democracy (against populist majoritarianism), privacy (against "surveillance capitalism"), and human rights (against the surveillance state). This project implies a new kind

of patriotism, and, insofar as it has succeeded, it has provoked a counterrevolution from those who believe that globalisation and European integration threaten their wealth, culture, and status. Le Pen presents herself as the tribune of this new-old version of European identity. Describing Macron as a globalist agent of death who will lead France and Europe to cultural suicide, she claims to represent the forgotten farmers and workers whose interests have been sidelined for the benefit of economic elites and refugees.

The structural dynamics of the French electoral system have intensified the dialectical relationship between these two versions of European identity, with the traditional contest between the centre left and the centre right giving way to a showdown between Christian ethnic nationalism and civic internationalist patriotism. But France is hardly alone. One finds similar divisions across Europe. Movements to "take back control" have mobilised voters against the openness and internationalism that underpin the new European identity.

The problem with the European far right is obvious. Despite her appeals to religion and traditional values, Le Pen's xenophobia, Islamophobia, and implicit white supremacy have alienated a large share of the global population, not least the world's 1.9 billion Muslims. What is more surprising is that attempts by internationalists such as Macron to develop a civic identity have sometimes also reduced Europe's appeal in many parts of the world. His version of Europe supports gender parity, minority rights, and environmental action, but it has also been increasingly willing to subordinate sovereign power to the imperatives of markets and supranational principles and institutions.

These new priorities have naturally been met with charges of hypocrisy. Many European countries that slammed their doors during the 2015 Syrian refugee crisis are now offering a warm, open-

ended welcome to the blond, blue-eyed refugees fleeing from Ukraine. And, as many attendees at this year's Doha Forum noted, the West's commitment to the principle of sovereignty in Ukraine rings somewhat hollow after years of Western drones patrolling the skies above Pakistan and Afghanistan. Weren't these the same countries that changed international borders in Kosovo, overthrew Muammar al-Qaddafi in Libya, and invaded Iraq? Moreover, after raping the planet for centuries, Europe has now decided to present itself as a champion of climate change mitigation and environmental protection.

What is most off-putting is the way that Europeans tend to universalise their own experience, often assuming that what is right for them is right for others. For various historical reasons, most European societies have embraced a balance between majoritarian democracy, minority rights, and private property, and we now take this package of principles as a given. But as the Arab Spring showed, people elsewhere might opt for the right to vote without demanding the full package. Those who rebelled against authoritarian regimes sought to emancipate themselves, not to mimic the West.

The world seems to be moving from an era of imperialism to one of decolonisation. In the former, the success of the capitalist economic model and new communication technologies helped spread Western ideas and values worldwide, but now, countries and societies increasingly want to celebrate their own values and culture.

This paradigm shift has profound implications for everyone, but especially for Europe. Powers that want to prosper will need to embrace a "sovereignty-friendly" idea of soft power. Failing that, we Europeans will always be accused of using our norms and standards to defend white privilege. We will remain at odds with the new project of decolonisation, and thus out of step with much of the international community.

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Does anyone care about the jute mill workers?



RUHUL AMIN

Ruhul Amin is the coordinator of Sramik Krishak Chhatra Janata Oikya Parishad.

ON April 21, we held a human chain programme at Khulna Shivbari intersection demanding payment of arrears of jute mill workers and reopening of closed jute mills. At the end of the programme, when everyone was getting on a truck to return to Khalishpur, a worker of Khalishpur Jute Mill named Kohinoor Begum (age 51 or 52 years) grabbed my hand and said, "Baba, I will not get on the truck."

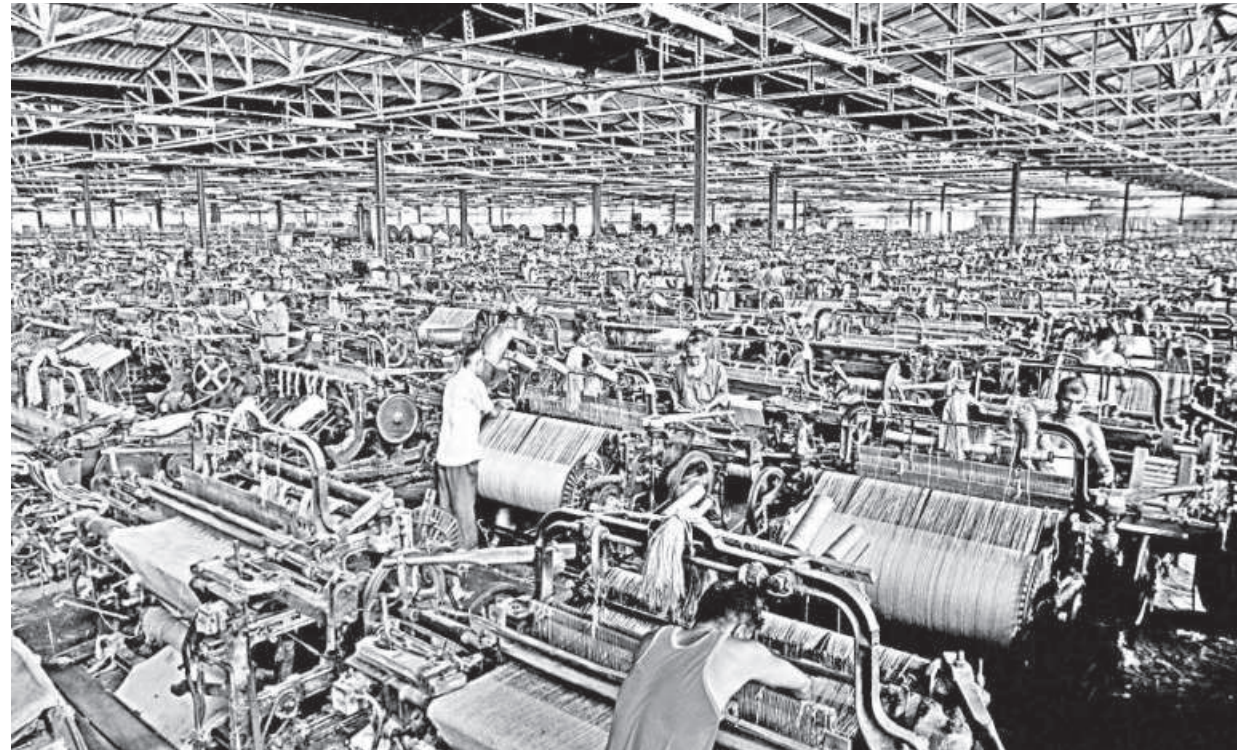
I was a little surprised and asked, "Why? How will you go?"

She replied, "I will walk around a bit. I cannot beg on familiar streets."

Kohinoor Begum, a worker at Khalishpur Jute Mill No 1, roamed around the crowded city seeking help. Other workers left for home after finishing the programme. But her hand, which was raised up earlier to claim her debt, went down asking for assistance.

The situation of a large number of workers, particularly women and elderly workers, in Khalishpur region, is similar to that of Kohinoor Begum. They are now helpless despite being skilled. After the closure of the jute mill, they have been living the life of a beggar without having a regular job. Their bold looks have faded away; they are almost unrecognisable today.

Alamgir, a former employee of Star Jute Mill, used to earn Tk 4,800-5,500 per week working six hours a day. Now, after 12 hours of night duty as a guard in Khulna



city (9pm-9am), he gets a monthly salary of only Tk 7,000. Additional six hours of duty in the day time provides him with Tk 5,000. How can a family survive on so little?

Today, a skilled jute mill worker has to work as a night guard in the city. There is no security in their lives. That is why Reshma, daughter of Khalishpur Jute Mill worker Badsha, could not get admission in a new class despite being first in her class.

Many helpless workers have joined private jute mills where the daily allowance is Tk 180-220. They get only 20-30 minutes of food break. There are no holidays. They don't have the right to form a trade union.

▲ **The government closed all state-run jute mills on July 2, 2020, laying off 70,000 workers.**

FILE PHOTO: STAR

As a result, workers have no freedom of speech.

If a worker has an accident while working, the mill authorities do not take any responsibility for it. There is no maternity leave. During the Covid-19 lockdown, almost all government and non-government workers in the country were given an allowance, but no worker in any private jute mills received such assistance.

The safety situation of women workers is extremely poor. Many female workers are being sexually harassed, especially while working in the C Shift (10pm to 6am). But there is no one to take care of these issues. If you complain, it is not taken into

account.

The largest private jute mill in the Khulna-Jashore region employs over 10,000 workers. The same situation prevails there. The union that the owner has formed to show the mill's foreign buyers is of no use to the workers. Rather, they work for the owner.

The skills acquired by the workers who have been working in the state-owned jute mills for 15-20 years are being sold today to the private sector at a very cheap price. Many workers, who now get one-third of the government's wage while working almost double, strongly believe that there is some type of government machination at work behind this whole process.

At a time when the demand for jute products in the world is increasing, and new private jute mills are being established, government workers are being handed over to the private mills as the government-owned mills are closed down. The plan is to exploit these helpless labourers because they don't know any other work.

On July 2, 2020, amid Covid lockdown, the government announced the closure of 25 jute mills and laid off 70,000 workers. Without paying the dues, the workers were evicted from the colony in clear violation of the labour law in Bangladesh.

About 11,000 workers of five jute mills, including Khalishpur-Daulatpur jute mill, in Khalishpur haven't yet received their arrears. Having to leave their earnings with the government, the workers are now starving.

Idris Ali, an elderly worker sitting at the mill gate, said in grief one day, "No one cares about us, the government has snatched our jobs, and now the Almighty has also turned his face away from us."

This article was translated from Bangla by Tanveer Ahmed Chowdhury.

One SMS can save thousands of farmers



SAIFUR RAHMAN

Saifur Rahman is a senior IT specialist working in the Australian Public Service.

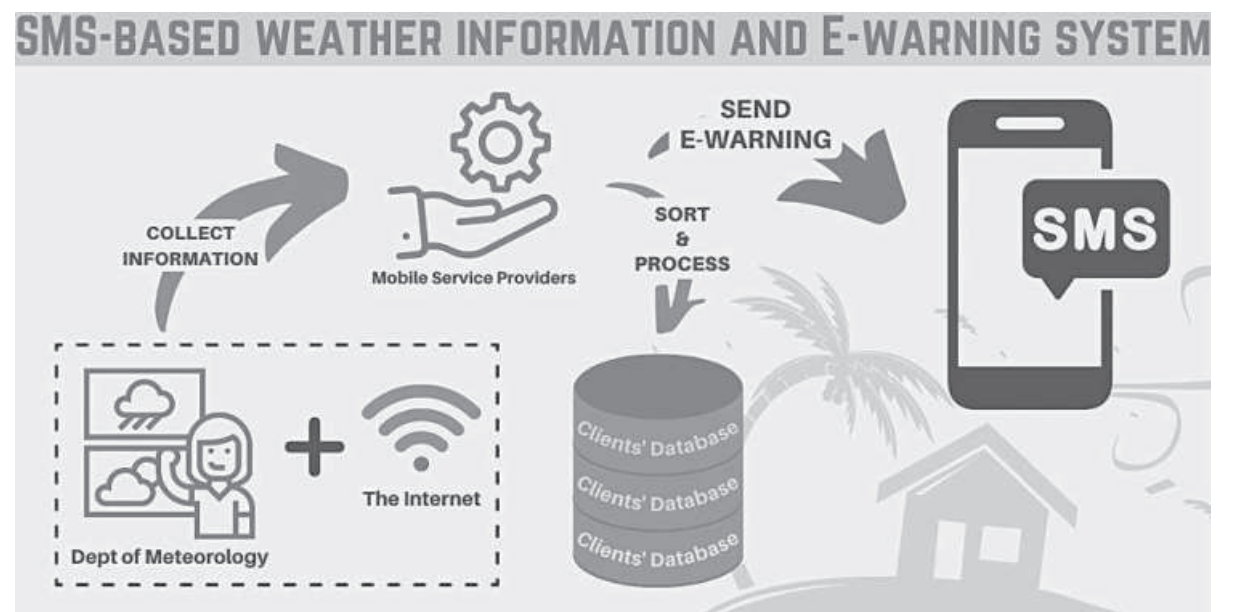
ON February 7 this year, an article by Mostafa Shabuj in *The Daily Star* Bangla titled "Why can't the government send timely weather information to farmers?" made me pause. The article mentioned an incident of heavy rainfall earlier this year that swamped vast areas of Joypurhat, Bogura and Dinajpur, damaging standing potato crops. It is assumed that had the farmers received prior information of the rainfall, they could have saved about 25 percent of their hard-earned produce. Such episodes are quite common, and the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) suggests that calamities of various degrees cause about Tk 30,000 crore worth of damage to properties across the country each year, of which 40 percent is standing crops, poultry and fisheries. Such losses can be minimised by providing the farmers with timely weather information. It is vital for our agriculture, a sector that feeds the whole country and provides more than one-third of our total employment.

Bangladesh's weather prediction mechanism is modelled after US technology, which is capable of predicting weather events 16 days in advance. Mostafa Shabuj's article raises an important question: Why should farmers accept such losses in the day and age of technological excellence? One of the main objectives of a disaster management system is to warn the masses about an upcoming calamity.

Traditionally, radio and television channels have served that purpose, but with the advent of smartphones, the use of such old technologies has declined. Long- and short-term weather information are now available on different websites, but many farmers at grassroots level don't have smartphones or access to the internet. In order to overcome this bottleneck, the short-message service (SMS) on mobile phones can be utilised, since it does not depend on smart devices or the internet, and thus can reach any citizen in the country if they use a mobile phone.

There are two ways of transmitting SMS: a) the "Push type," where messages are sent to the subscribers without being asked (Govt Info is one such service that disseminates important information to the general public); and b) the "Pull type," where mobile phone users subscribe to an information relaying service (Bangladesh Railway has such a system that sends SMS with information about the location and arrival time of a train on request.) Mobile phone subscribers receive four to five push SMS daily on average from their service providers, most of which are informational or promotional. No weather information or warning as such is currently being transmitted via SMS.

The e-warning system is a communication strategy that gives people an early warning on all hazards and natural disasters to pursue effective response actions to tackle disasters before impact, thus dramatically reducing their effects on lives, properties and, in the case of farmers, crops and farm products. In order to be effective in Bangladesh, a) The system must be free, without requiring any registration or subscription; b) Users should not need a smart device or the internet—ordinary mobile phones should



▲ **The e-warning system is a communication strategy that gives people an early warning on all hazards and natural disasters to pursue effective actions to tackle disasters before impact.**

VISUAL: AFIA JAHIN

be enough; and c) Information must be delivered without request. An SMS based weather information system can meet all these requirements.

Now, who can provide this service? The Indian government launched an SMS-based cyclone warning in as early as 2014. Our government can launch a similar system, but I suggest that mobile phone service providers deliver such a facility as part of their social responsibility. These providers are best placed to develop such a system since they have information on the locations of their subscribers and can track them in real time. This data is at the heart of the whole system. In a nutshell, the application will collect short- and long-term weather information from the Met Office or acquire them from different weather forecast websites. That data would then be sorted and processed according to locations

(e.g. upazila based) and an SMS would be pushed with warning and weather data as per the location of a subscriber. The system can be powered by artificial intelligence (AI) and fully automated, reducing the cost of operation to a minimum.

There can be arguments against such a system, citing that not all farmers own even the simplest of mobile phones. But with the number of mobile phone subscriptions at over 170 million (2020), such an argument is extremely futile, if not outright wrong. SMS has been widely adopted in Bangladesh, so an SMS based e-warning system can be one of the best suited solutions. Culturally, rural Bangladesh is still a close-knit society. If a single mobile phone owner in the whole village receives an SMS warning on an upcoming storm, that information would surely spread within minutes.

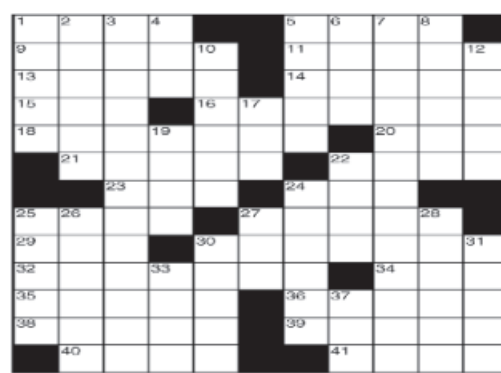
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CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**
- 1 Jazz singing style
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- 1 Whirls
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 - 27 Good serve
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SUNDAY'S ANSWERS



BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



WRITE FOR US. SEND US YOUR OPINION PIECES TO dsopinion@gmail.com.

The jersey that Argentina football legend Diego Maradona wore while scoring twice against England in the 1986 World Cup, including the infamous "hand of God" goal, was auctioned for \$9.3 million, a record for any item of sports memorabilia, Sotheby's said. Seven bidders vied for the garment in an auction that began April 20 and ended Wednesday morning, Sotheby's said, without releasing the name of the buyer.



Bangladesh begin campaign tomorrow

SPORTS REPORTER

Bangladesh hockey team will start their Men's Asian Games qualifiers campaign against Indonesia tomorrow in Bangkok. The players in red and green left for Bangkok on Wednesday night for the nine-nation qualifiers event, which starts on May 6.

The top six teams will join India, Japan, Malaysia, Korea, Pakistan and China in the 12-team hockey event of Asian Games in China in September.

The charges of Iman Gobinathan Krishnamurthy went through three weeks of training at BKSP and Dhaka before and during the Eid holidays.

FIXTURES

May 7 - Bangladesh vs Indonesia
May 10 - Bangladesh vs Sri Lanka
May 12 - Bangladesh vs Singapore.

"We have had a nice Eid even though we trained in the morning before offering prayers at Baitul Mokarram Mosque," said captain Babu, who will wear the captain's armband for the first time since making debut in 2014.

"We have focused on the Asian Games Qualifiers with a bit change in strategy during the training at BKSP, so that opponents can't understand the way we want to play. Because the participating teams saw us in the AHF Cup in May where we became Champions," said the 25-year-old player.

THE PURSUIT OF TEST approach continues

SPORTS REPORTER

The Bangladesh national team players are enjoying their Eid vacations, many of them away from the hubbub of city life, enjoying their time away with friends and families. The excursion into their childhood surroundings would have given them the much-needed peace and quiet away from cricket's adrenaline rush but the vacations are at an end and a tough home assignment awaits in Sri Lanka.

Thus, challenges simmer under the vacation bubble and the need to improve after a difficult Test tour of South Africa are already on the agenda with the team management thinking of the cricketers' mental sharpness after returning from a break while also looking to improve the issue of the Team's Test approach after it gave away in the two Tests against the Proteas.

The Lankans are due in the country on May 8th and with that in mind, the Bangladesh team management have chalked out their scheduling for the upcoming two-match Test series. Bangladesh's overseas coaching staff are all expected to return by May 7 and the team will depart for Chattogram on May 8 (Sunday) evening. The team will gear up for the first Test with their training camp scheduled to begin from May 9.

Team director Khaled Mahmud was pretty aware of the challenges facing Bangladesh while up against an



I don't know whether the main problem stems from psychological issues but the main thing is that we have to be positive. Being positive doesn't mean we have to play aggressive strokeplay, what I mean is to have a positive mindset.

Khaled Mahmud

opponent like Sri Lanka at home.

"Sri Lanka are always a tough opponent, especially in the subcontinent. They play spin well and they are well-adjusted to the heat here so it will not take them time to acclimatise," Mahmud said about the upcoming series.

The team management have not yet unfolded the reasons for the batting debacle in South Africa but from what they have been able to ascertain, the approach became problematic due to

challenges of a mental nature.

"We had a bad phase in South Africa and the truth is that we were outplayed. The important thing right now is that we have to perform well to get out of that phase. This series presents us with the challenge of playing good cricket. The only positive for us was the first innings in South Africa in the first Test in South Africa.

"There were signs that we can show the required approach but we only showed that approach a few times. I

don't know whether the main problem stems from psychological issues but the main thing is that we have to be positive. Being positive doesn't mean we have to play aggressive strokeplay, what I mean is to have a positive mindset. We have had a plan for a long time but have not been able to establish it yet which is to play 150 overs. We haven't found that approach and been able to establish it."

Despite what skipper Mominul Haque said about their approach being pretty similar in South Africa to Mount Maunganui in New Zealand, Mahmud recognises that the team cannot be in two minds approach-wise. Bangladesh went in favour of batting depth in recent Tests but that theory cannot go on.

"We can't play like this as a Test team for a long time. We say that we aren't a settled team in Tests and that's the truth because for that you have to play five bowlers.

"If the batters, at least the experienced ones in the side, can take the responsibility, we can play five bowlers," Mahmud said about the inclusion of five bowlers.

Mehedi Miraz was ruled out of the first Test but the team director opined that they have to stick to their positive mindset. "We have played fast bowlers recently. If you do not play Khaled [Ahmed] or Shoriful [Islam] then we will be going backwards. We have to get out of the culture of not banking on our pacers in home Tests," he concluded.

Archer feared he might not play again

REUTERS, LONDON

England speedster Jofra Archer feared he might not play again after undergoing two bouts of surgery on his troublesome elbow, the 27-year-old said.

Archer has not played international cricket since March last year and had a second round of elbow surgery in December.

The time he spent on the sidelines filled him with doubts about his career, said the Barbados-born player.

"In a situation like this, when you are forced to have operations, you do think about whether you are going to play cricket again, whether you're going to play all formats even," Archer wrote in his Daily Mail column.

"But the ECB (English board) gave me the assurance and peace of mind that they wanted me around for a long time.

"At one point I thought I was going to lose my contract when things weren't going well."

Archer is targeting a return in the T20 Blast later this month though he is doubtful for the home series against New Zealand next month under new Test captain Ben Stokes.



Nadal terms his injury recovery a 'roller coaster'

REUTERS

Rafa Nadal said his recovery from a rib injury has been like a "roller coaster" after the 21-times major winner returned to action with a win over Miomir Kecmanovic at the Madrid Open.

The Australian Open champion was playing in his first event since picking up the injury at Indian Wells in March but showed little signs of rust, cruising to a 6-1 7-6(4) victory on Wednesday. Read full story

"I leave the match very, very happy. You have to be sincere with yourself ... my preparation has not existed. You cannot expect great things at the beginning," Nadal told reporters.

"All trainings have had some up-and-downs, it's been a roller coaster. I have had better days, worse days.

"At the end of the day, the rib is a problem that limits your game a lot."

The Spaniard added that training had been difficult due to the nature of the injury but he was not worried about his lack of preparation ahead of the French Open later this month, where he will be bidding for a record-extending 14th title.

"There are injuries that allow you to do physical work, aerobic work. The rib has not allowed me to do anything ... but I'm not worried. I just think that every minute that I am out there on the court is something positive," the 35-year-old said.

"I don't have any pain in my rib. I had a little bit of pain at the beginning of the week, and then I went to get a MRI so they could check it, Friday or Saturday when I came here, and the image on the machine was good."

Nadal, a five-times champion in Madrid, will take on Belgium's David Goffin in the last 16 later on Thursday.





A rematch of the 2018 final in Paris

AFP, Paris

A third all-English Champions League final in four years seemed to be on the cards but Real Madrid's incredible late comeback against Manchester City on Wednesday has set up a rematch between the Spanish club and Liverpool in Paris on May 28.

Madrid's epic European campaign hit new heights as they came back from the dead against Pep Guardiola's City, trailing 1-0 on the night and 5-3 on aggregate.

Liverpool survived a first-half scare to reach the Champions League final with a 3-2 win at Villarreal on Tuesday, for a 5-2 aggregate victory, after the night had threatened to turn sour for Jurgen Klopp's side.

The final at the Stade de France will be a repeat of the 2018 showpiece, when Gareth Bale's stunning double secured a 3-1 win for Real Madrid in Kiev and gave them their record-extending 13th European Cup.

Seven members of the Real team involved that night four years ago also featured against City on Wednesday, just as seven Liverpool players in 2018 played in the win at Villarreal.

"We have a score to settle," wrote Mohamed Salah on Twitter as the Liverpool forward kicked off the hostilities early.

It will be Liverpool's third final in five seasons



A surreal night of 'FOOTBALL MADNESS'

NABID YEASIN

It can't just be luck. But logic doesn't explain it either. What had transpired at the Santiago Bernabeu on Wednesday night was something so improbable that it almost seems scripted.

Real Madrid were dead and buried. They were chasing the Premier League leaders, Manchester City, by a goal in the match, trailing 5-3 on aggregate, up until the stroke of second half's stoppage time of the second leg of a Champions League semifinal. Most teams would not even dare to dream of a resurrection from then on, let alone actually pulling it off.

But Real Madrid aren't most teams. With the game in its final minute of regulation time, Karim Benzema leaped into the air to cushion a cross back in the box for Rodrygo who, as if from nowhere, emerged to tap it in. A minute later, the diminutive Brazilian, who came on as a substitute, would once again pop up to head in a perfectly floated cross as Real roared back to level terms on aggregate.

Five minutes into the first half of extra time and, in probably the most fitting way, Benzema, Los Blancos' talisman, earned and converted a spot-kick to complete a comeback so staggering that will probably be talked about over and over.

With a 3-1 on the night, and a 6-5 win on aggregate, Real head to their 17th Champions League final to vie for their 14th title. But as mentioned earlier, neither logic nor the factor of luck can explain yesterday's outcome and their path to the final. City coach Pep Guardiola rightly said after the match, "Football is unpredictable, it is a game like this. We have to accept it."

By logic, stats and numbers, Manchester City should have been the one heading to

"We need time now, one or two days, but we'll rise, we come up, we have to do it with our people. That feeling that happens in football sometimes, that has happened in history, when you are leading but you get to the end and you are being dominated - that didn't happen to us."

Pep Guardiola



Paris. But instead, it is Real Madrid who will be playing Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool in what promises to be an enthralling final on May 28.

Despite being assertive in the initial phase of the game, Benzema and Vinicius Junior, both of whom have often been the saviours for Real in crucial ties, were struggling to put the final touch.

In fact, Rodrygo's equaliser in the 90th minute was Real's first shot on target. By that time, City, however, had 10 shots with eight of those on target, dominated the possession, and also took the lead through a superb left-foot strike from Riyad Mahrez in the 73rd minute.

But despite failing to find their feet for the majority of the game, Real had once again found a way through, just as they did against

Paris Saint-Germain in the Round of 16 and Chelsea in the quarterfinal.

On each of these occasions, Real were never the superior side. They only had brief spells of, as Guardiola explained yesterday's game, 'football madness' that saw them beat PSG despite being 2-0 down till the first half of the second leg and overcome defending champions Chelsea even after losing the home-leg 3-2.

These consecutive comebacks can also not be only credited to luck as all these moments of individual brilliance were produced by players on the field due to their sheer determination.

One thing that could have worked here is the never-say-die attitude that gets instilled in every player's DNA that drapes himself in the all-whites. That could explain how a 21-year-old Rodrygo found in him the composure for those late finishes and a 19-year-old Eduardo Camavinga, who too came on as a substitute, played the two crucial passes leading to goals while City's more experienced, proven and much more expensive bench failed when playing under pressure.

One of City's star substitutes, Jack Grealish, the club's £100 million signing, looked ominous and was denied twice around the 88th minute when City were still leading - first by a goal-line clearance by a Madrid defender before Thibaut Courtois split his legs to deflect his drive heading for the bottom corner. But once Real had drawn level, Grealish couldn't be the same player thereafter.

It only shows that 'Until the end we go, Real!' is not just the club's anthem but it is instilled in the DNA of every player and management staff of the club and that's what make them the most successful club in Europe.

"The greatness of this club is this. It is a club that does not allow you to lower your arms when it seems that everything is over. It is a feeling that gives you the strength to continue, to continue to believe... We played a match against a very strong rival, solid, competitive... When everything seemed to be over, we looked for the last bit of energy to match it."

Carlo Ancelotti

'Greatest night in the history of the Bernabeu'

REUTERS

Spanish media heaped praise on Real Madrid after the La Liga winners pulled off a remarkable comeback win against Manchester City on Wednesday to advance to the Champions League final.

Leading 1-0 with minutes to go, City seemed to be heading for Paris before a late Rodrygo double and an extra-time penalty from Karim Benzema gave the hosts an unlikely 3-1 win on the night and secured a 6-5 victory on aggregate. Read full story

"Real Madrid are out of this world," Madrid-based AS said in their headline, accompanied by a picture of the squad celebrating in front of a section of the home crowd.

Sport newspaper simply went with "Incredible" after Real once again turned around a first-leg deficit following their last 16 win against Paris St. Germain earlier in the competition.

Marca hailed it as the "greatest night in the history of the Bernabeu".

"If PSG was already inexplicable, if Chelsea was already incredible, last night in Chamartin was, simply, the best night of a stadium that has seen this team in all colours and that is a lot to say," read their lead story.

The Barcelona-based Mundo Deportivo described it as "Groundhog Day" while Catalan radio station RAC1 said "this is not football, it's a paranormal phenomenon".

Real will take on Liverpool in a rematch of the 2018 Champions League final at the Stade de France on May 28.



Brazilian forward Rodrygo arrived as the saviour for Real Madrid against Manchester City during the UEFA Champions League semi-final second leg at the Santiago Bernabeu in Madrid on Wednesday.

PHOTO: AFP

This is Real Madrid's 17th UCL final, the most by any team in the history of the tournament.

Real Madrid is the first team in Champions League history to reach the final despite losing three games across the Round of 16, Quarterfinals and Semifinals.

Benzema now has scored 43 goals in 43 goals this season, 15 in this season's UCL campaign.

Rodrygo becomes the first player to score twice in the 90th minute of a Champions League knockout match

Karim Benzema has now equalled Cristiano Ronaldo's record of most goals in the knockout stage in a season of UCL (10).

Real Madrid vs Liverpool is the only encounter to occur in 3 European Cup finals (Liverpool defeated Real Madrid 1-0 in 1981; Real Madrid defeated Liverpool 3-1 in 2018).

Liverpool are one of only three teams in history to beat Real Madrid in a European Cup final and the last team to do so (1981, also in Paris).

HIGHEST SELLING 15 CEMENT for more than years



City dwellers with their children gather at the Hatirjheel lake on Wednesday, the last day of the Eid holidays. Children are seen having a good time. There are only a few children-friendly parks and recreation spots in the capital and most of the good ones are pay-to-use. PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

No Eid cheer for shrinking remittance

Inflows drop 2.9pc in April

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Even Eid-ul-Fitr, typically a boon for remittance inflows, failed to buck the trend of sliding receipts this year.

In April, expatriate Bangladeshis sent home about \$2 billion, down about 2.9 percent year-on-year, according to data from the Bangladesh Bank.

The amount though is the highest since May last year, when about \$2.17 billion was received. Eid-ul-Fitr, the biggest festival in Bangladesh, was celebrated in the middle of May last year.

After a spike in inflows for the global coronavirus pandemic, which broke down the informal channels of cross-border money transfer, remittance receipts began contracting in July last year and have been registering negative growth since.

To stem the trend, the government in January increased the cash incentive on remittances sent through the proper channels to 2.5 percent from 2 percent.

But that appears to be failing to work its magic thanks to the higher kerb market rate than the official exchange rate for the dollar.

Each dollar is selling for about Tk 92 in the kerb market. The official exchange rate for the dollar is Tk 86.45.

April's inflows take the remittance received so far this fiscal year to \$17.3 billion, down 16.3 percent year-on-year.

When announcing the increased cash incentive on remittance, Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal said the move would boost receipts to \$26 billion this fiscal

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

EID JOURNEY HOME

Largely hassle-free, yet 40 die on roads

STAR REPORT

People's Eid journey home was unusually smooth with less hassle than before but crashes claimed at least 40 lives during the holidays.

Illegal and risky three-wheelers and bikers on largely empty roads were behind most of the crashes since Eid day.

At least 27 others were also injured in the 28 crashes in 13 districts between Saturday and yesterday.

Most of the crashers were on Tuesday (Eid day), Wednesday, and yesterday.

Bikes were involved in 11 and three-wheelers in 12 of the 28 crashes.

The number of accidents is believed to be much higher as many crashes go unreported.

Usually, there are more crashes after the holidays when people return to the capital and there is not as good monitoring by law enforcers.

On Saturday, tens of thousands of people left Dhaka to celebrate the Eid. Over 1 crore active mobile SIM cards left

Dhaka between April 27 and May 1, giving a hint about the rush.

Although some possible bottlenecks on Dhaka-

Hadiuzzaman said.

He, however, said a large number of people left Dhaka on motorcycles, which is an

APR 30-MAY 5

- Total accidents 28
- Bike involved 11
- Three-wheeler 12
- Truck, bus, car 5

"This is new but bad a trend because bikes on long journeys are very risky."

Transport expert Prof Hadiuzzaman

DEATHS

Rangpur 5	Mymensingh 2
Joypurhat 4	Dhaka 4
Dinajpur 4	Bagerhat 3
Pabna 3	Barishal 2
Sirajganj 3	Cox's Bazar 1
Tangail 2	
Cumilla 6	
Magura 1	

Tangail-Rangpur and Dhaka-Mymensingh highways and two ferry terminals on the Padma had

been concerns before Eid, strict monitoring by the authorities, proper management at choking points, and some people's

departure from Dhaka well ahead of the holidays made the Eid journey for others relatively smooth, transport expert Prof

ominous sign because bikes on long journeys are very risky.

He said the number of crashes increased from the Eid day as bikes, minibuses, and three-wheelers drove recklessly in light traffic.

Hadiuzzaman, also director of Accident Research Institute of Buet, said the authorities should

SEE PAGE 6 COL 5

Western aid can't prevent Russian victory

Says Moscow on Ukraine war

AFP, Zaporizhzhia

Russia yesterday said Western aid to Kyiv had slowed its offensive in Ukraine but would not thwart its victory, as conflicting reports emerged about efforts to rescue civilians from a besieged steel plant in the devastated city of Mariupol.

Nearly 10 weeks into a war that has left thousands of people dead, flattened Ukrainian cities and uprooted more than 13 million people, the Kremlin conceded that Western countries had prevented a "quick" end to Russia's military campaign.

"The United States, Britain, Nato as a whole hand over intelligence... to Ukraine's armed forces on a permanent basis," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said.

"Coupled with the flow of weapons that these countries are sending to Ukraine, these are all actions that do not contribute to the quick completion of the operation," he told reporters.

The outside help, nevertheless, was "incapable of hindering the achievement" of the goals of Russia's military operation, he insisted.

Peskov was responding to a New York Times article on Wednesday that said intelligence provided by the United States has helped the Ukrainian military target "many" of the approximately dozen Russian generals who have been killed so far in the war.

Since failing to take Kyiv early on in its invasion, which Moscow launched on February 24, Russia has focused its efforts on the east and south of Ukraine.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, who has tirelessly campaigned for help from allies, yesterday launched a global crowdfunding platform to help Kyiv win the war and rebuild the country's infrastructure.

Zelensky launches a global crowdfunding platform to help Kyiv win the war

Russian forces are on the verge of taking full control of the strategically important port of Mariupol, where Ukrainian troops holed up in the besieged Azovstal steelworks are making their land stand.

Hundreds of soldiers and civilians have been trapped in the factory's Soviet-era underground tunnels in what has become the last pocket of resistance in the area.

Russia's defence ministry on Wednesday announced a daytime ceasefire for three days at the steelworks to evacuate civilians from the plant, which started yesterday morning.

Peskov said yesterday that humanitarian corridors to get civilians out of Azovstal "are functioning today". But there was no confirmation of the evacuations by the Ukrainian side.

Elsewhere, the governor of the Donbas region Pavlo Kyrylenko said at least 25 civilians were wounded in an overnight Russian strike on the city of Kramatorsk.

As well as sending money and weapons to Ukraine, Kyiv's Western allies have imposed unprecedented sanctions on Russia to punish it for the invasion.

The European Union on Wednesday proposed a gradual ban on Russian oil imports, in what would be the bloc's toughest move yet over Moscow's invasion of its neighbour.

European Commission chief Ursula von der Leyen said the EU would "phase out Russian supply of crude oil within six months and refined products by the end of the year", a move that would still not touch its huge gas exports.

COVID PANDEMIC

13.3 to 16.6 million died in 2020-21: WHO

AFP, Geneva

The Covid-19 pandemic killed 13.3 to 16.6 million people in 2020 and 2021, the WHO estimated yesterday – up to triple the number of deaths attributed directly to the disease.

The World Health Organization's long-awaited estimate of the total number of deaths caused by the pandemic – including lives lost to its knock-on effects – finally puts a number on the broader impact of the crisis.

"New estimates from the World Health Organization show that the full death toll associated directly or indirectly with the Covid-19 pandemic between January 1, 2020 and December 31, 2021 was approximately 14.9 million (range 13.3 million to 16.6 million)," the UN health agency said in a statement.

The figure calculates what is termed as excess mortality due to the Covid-19 crisis, which has upended much of the planet for

more than two years.

"These sobering data not only point to the impact of the pandemic but also to the need for all countries to invest in more resilient health systems that can sustain essential health services during crises, including stronger health information systems," WHO chief Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said.

Excess mortality is calculated as the difference between the number of deaths that have occurred and the number that would have been expected in the absence of the pandemic, based on data from earlier years.

Excess mortality includes deaths associated with Covid-19 directly, due to the disease, and indirectly due to the pandemic's impact on health systems and society.

The WHO declared Covid an international public health emergency on January 30, 2020, after cases of the new

SEE PAGE 6 COL 7



A frog, popularly known as Kulabang, spotted in the City Gate area of Chattogram after yesterday's downpour. Though this frog is seen in rural areas, it is not that common in urban areas.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

LPG price slashed by Tk 8.68 per kg

UNB, Dhaka

The energy regulator yesterday cut the prices of liquefied petroleum gas after three back-to-back months of hike on the back of a drop in price globally.

Bangladeshi private LPG operators mainly import the gas from the Middle East based on Saudi CP, which has come down, said Abdul Jalil, chairman of the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC), while announcing the new prices.

From 6:00pm yesterday, the per kilogram of LPG is Tk 111.26, down by Tk 8.68 from the previous month.

This means a 12 kg LPG cylinder, the most common form for marketing the fuel, will

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