

NEW MARKET CLASH 2 more shop employees arrested

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Detectives yesterday arrested two more shop employees over last month's fierce clashes between Dhaka College students and shopkeepers of New Market that left two people dead and scores injured.

The arrestees are: Kawsar and Babu Hossain. Both were employees of Capital Fast Food at New Market. They were held at Hazaribagh, said Faruk Hossain, deputy commissioner (media) of Dhaka Metropolitan Police.

On April 18, the arrestees were involved in a brawl with the employees of nearby Welcome Fast Food that eventually led to repeated clashes the following day.

Rab arrested Mehedi Hasan Bappi and Moazzam Hossain Sajeeb, former employees of Welcome Fast Food, on May 4 for their alleged involvement in initiating the clash.

The two killed during the clashes are Nahid Mia, a delivery man, and Morsalin, a shop employee.

Nahid was attacked in front of Nur Jahan Super Market. Later, video footage of the incident went viral.

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

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.

At least six Dhaka College students were earlier arrested in the Nahid murder case.

PHONE HACKING Spain's spy chief sacked

AFP, Madrid

Spain's government yesterday sacked the country's spy chief as part of a widening scandal over the hacking of the mobile phones of the prime minister and Catalan separatist leaders.



Farmers trying to salvage their watermelon after heavy rain, caused by storm Asani, inundates their cropland in Barguna Sadar upazila's Nimtali village yesterday.

PHOTO: SOHRAB HOSSAIN

'I can assure you of best policy framework'

PM tells visiting US-Bangladesh Business Council

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday invited US businesspersons with the assurance of the best possible policy framework for an investment-friendly atmosphere in Bangladesh.

"With strong prospects, I can now assure you of the best possible policy framework to ease our business and investment climate," she said.

The premier made the call during a meeting with the visiting first ever executive business delegation, US-Bangladesh Business Council, at the Gono Bhaban.

Sheikh Hasina said she believes that the US businesses will take the advantage and invest more in promising sectors like power and energy, ICT, infrastructure, light engineering products, mobile phone and electronic goods, automobile, agro-processing, pharmaceuticals, and ceramics.

She mentioned that Bangladesh is

now recognised for the state-of-the-art manufacturing factories in various sectors like RMG, leather, plastic, jute, ICT and agro-processing.

The prime minister said that she believes that the US-Bangladesh Energy Taskforce which was launched in September 2021 will help advance energy cooperation among the stakeholders of both countries.

Likewise, the proposed US-Bangladesh Digital Economy Taskforce will contribute to deepen the cooperation of companies of both countries to ensure sustainable development, she noted.

"Our trade relations can be further strengthened with duty-free access and other trade privileges in the US market," she said, adding that "Bangladesh is ready to commence Free Trade Agreement negotiations with the US at an appropriate time."

Expressing gratitude to the US Chamber to recognise Bangladesh as one of its potential partners for enhanced trade and

investment, Sheikh Hasina hoped that this visit and exchange of views with the relevant government and private bodies will further explore the expected business to business partnership and, will definitely double the trade volume and benefit the private sectors of both countries.

Bangladesh has been recommended to graduate from the LDC in 2026 and the country is aspiring to become a developed and prosperous country by 2041, she said, adding that "We need enhanced investment from friendly countries, especially from the USA."

Terming Bangladesh as an attractive investment destination, she said along with physical infrastructures, the country has upgraded and eased the rules and regulations relating to investment and business.

The PM added: "Bangladesh has the most liberal investment policy in South Asia and its foreign investment is protected by acts of parliament and bilateral treaties."

Recently, all areas of Bangladesh have been brought under electricity coverage, she said, adding, "We are upgrading our road, railway and water communications by implementing some mega projects."



Asani weakens, moves towards Indian coast

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Bengal and deep sea have been advised to stay close to the coast and proceed with caution. They are also asked not to venture into the deep sea, said the bulletin.

"Light to moderate rain or thundershowers, accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind, is likely to occur at most places in Rajshahi, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Khulna, Barishal, Chattogram and Sylhet divisions and also at many places in Rangpur division with moderately

heavy to very heavy rains at various places across the country."

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) suspended operations of launches below 65 feet in length across the country since yesterday noon. Only those above 65 feet in length were allowed to ply.

"We will resume operation of small launches once the weather improves," Rafiqul Islam, director of BIWTA, told this newspaper.

Farmers mostly in the

southern part of the country fear losses of crops due to incessant rains caused by the cyclonic storm.

In Patuakhali, many pulse and chili growers said heavy rains caused severe damage to their crops.

"I cultivated Mughal and chili in around 25 decimals of lands. But the entire cropland is now submerged... I don't know whether the crops will survive..." said a dejected Ismail Khan, a farmer of Sonatala village in Kalapara upazila.

Rice growers in Pirojpur and

Jhalakathi were worried that heavy rains would badly damage their crops.

"Our Boro crop is almost ripe... We were getting ready to harvest it by next week. But our paddy fields are now flooded due to incessant rain," said Faruk Sheikh, a farmer from Sikdermollik village of Pirojpur Sadar upazila.

At least seven watermelon farms in Barguna's Nimtali village were submerged due to heavy rains. Farmers said they would incur a loss of

around Tk 7 lakh.

"We had a bumper watermelon production this year. Watermelon plants cannot withstand much water. This rain has damaged everything," said Nasir Khan, one of the farmers in the area.

The Cox's Bazar district administration has kept 576 cyclone shelters ready in case it needs to evacuate people from the coastal areas.

[Our correspondents from Patuakhali, Tangail, Pirojpur and Cox's Bazar contributed to the report]

Economy firing on all cylinders

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consumption is estimated to grow at 13.18 percent, the highest in five years.

Exports, which grew at an impressive 35.14 percent in the first 10 months of the fiscal year, are propping up the economy well.

Shamsul Alam, the state minister for planning, went on to cite the country's strong showing in the Nikkei Covid-19 Recovery Index, high vaccination rate and the improved performance in the Global Hunger Index as indicators of the economy's pink health.

"While the economy has not recovered fully from the pandemic, whatever recovery has been taken place is good enough."

The final growth figure might be higher, according to Alam, as the provisional estimate did not factor in the shopping frenzy in April centring Eid-ul-Fitr, the country's biggest festival in Bangladesh, which was observed on May 3.

Asked about the Russia-Ukraine war that has cast a pall of gloom on the global economic recovery from the pandemic trough, he said: "Admittedly, our recovery has been hampered but we are exercising good judgement."

Economists remain sceptical about the rosy picture presented.

"I demand full disclosure of data and methods of estimating the GDP growth rate for

fiscal 2021-22 -- these suspiciously high GDP growth estimates are not supported by the correlates and other proxy indicators," said Debapriya Bhattacharya, distinguished fellow of the Centre for Policy Dialogue.

The correlates include poor implementation of the annual development programme, weak offtake of private sector credit, sluggish import of capital goods and raw materials, tepid growth of energy use and so on, he added.

The fact the provisional growth figure is an exact match for the government's growth target is bound to raise eyebrows, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the WB's Dhaka office.

"If we are so good at forecasting GDP growth, how come all other targets such as revenue, expenditure and the composition of deficit financing consistently elude us and are always on the downside in case of revenue and expenditure?"

He also remains sceptical about the back-to-back double-digit growth witnessed by the industrial sector and the manufacturing sub-sectors.

"Such an impressively sustained recovery in industrial growth is at odds with the growth in electricity and gas use. Industrial growth and energy growth are supposed to be positively correlated. That is not the case here. One can't help

but wonder why."

Real value added growth in electricity declined from 11.65 percent in fiscal 2020-21 to 7.24 percent in fiscal 2021-22 and the same in gas declined respectively from 1.45 percent to 0.52 percent.

"On the demand side, there apparently was a boom in household consumption expenditures. Where has this come from? Remittance growth has been negative and agricultural growth has declined. Services grew by only 6.3 percent. Yes, garment exports have boomed, but the owners claim their profits have mostly been eaten away by increased prices of intermediate inputs."

Nominal wage growth in the production sectors for low skilled labour was 8.6 percent through March, which in real terms was less than 3 percent.

"I am not sure pent-up demand financed by drawing down financial savings accumulated in the past can fully explain such a consumption boom."

Last but not the least, private investment rate has increased from 23.7 percent of GDP in fiscal 2020-21 to 24.6 percent of GDP in fiscal 2022-23. This is still less than the 25.3 percent of GDP in fiscal 2018-19, the year before the pandemic.

"Yet, growth has returned to the 7.3 percent pre-pandemic three-year average," Hussain added.

Landslide kills two workers

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

Two construction workers were killed as a pile of earth came crashing down on them in Tangail town yesterday.

The deceased were Ananda Pal, 35, and Nidhan Pal, 30, of Kashil village in Basail upazila.

Rezaul Karim, assistant director of fire service and civil defence in Tangail, told The Daily Star that five workers were digging earth at 14-foot deep for constructing the building base at one Nazrul Islam's house in Ashekpur Purbopara area.

Amid downpour around 11:30am, a pile of earth collapsed on the two.

Fire service officials later recovered the two bodies after removing the earth by excavator, Rezaul said.

The owner started constructing the building just after filling up a pond with sand, Rezaul said, adding the accident happened for not taking necessary precautionary measures.

Contractor hacked to death

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Kushtia

Criminals beat up and hacked a contractor to death in Munshiganj Clinic Para area of Chuadanga's Alamdanga upazila over land dispute last night.

The victim was Kamal Hossain, 65, of Jehala village of the upazila.

His wife Selina Khatun alleged that one Swadhi and his family members murdered Kamal over a land dispute.

She also alleged that they threatened to kill her husband before Eid. Police were informed of the matter, she added.

Inspector Abdul Alim of Alamdanga Police Station said they did not get any written complaint in this regard.

Beaten by neighbours, homemaker dies

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jhenidah

A homemaker died yesterday after she was beaten up mercilessly by her neighbours in Jhenidah's Harinakundu over a trifling matter on Sunday.

Asmani Khatun, 40, was the wife of Amjad Hossain of Berbinni village.

Her husband Amjad Hossain said Asmani got locked into an altercation with her neighbour Sumaya Khatun, wife of Uzzal Hossain, over ducks having paddy on Sunday.

Later in the day, when Asmani went to a nearby waterbody for taking her ducks back home, Sumaya and her family members beat her up indiscriminately, Amjad added.

Asmani was taken to Jhenidah Sadar Hospital. As her condition was worsening, she was referred to Faridpur Medical College Hospital where she died early yesterday.

After the incident, Sumaya and her family members went into hiding.

Saiful Islam, OC of Harinakundu Police Station, said filing of a case was underway.