

**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 Nimgali 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."



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 Mungdal 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 Nimgali 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]

## BNP dead against, EC undecided

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He, however, said the Commission does not have the capacity to use EVMs in all the 300 seats right now. "We can hold voting in around 100 seats with EVMs."

On Saturday, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, also the AL chief, said at a meeting of the AL Central Working Committee that voting in all 300 constituencies will take place using EVMs, according to insiders.

The next day, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader told journalists at the Secretariat that EVMs will be used in the next general election due late next year.

Political and election commentators view these statements from the AL top brass as a pressure on the EC, the sole authority to decide on the matter.

"Whether EVMs will be used or not in the polls is at the absolute discretion of the Election Commission.

But the Commission is now under pressure as the Awami League said it wants EVMs in all the parliamentary seats," former election commissioner Brigadier General (retd) Sakhawat Hussain told The Daily Star.

Despite having the full mandate for making such decisions, the Commission now has to walk a tightrope, he added.

A number of civil society members and eminent citizens in recent talks with the EC opined that the Commission should refrain from using EVMs in polls unless there is a national consensus.

"The issue of EVM is contentious now and it is better to keep a distance from that unless there is a national consensus on it," Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Distinguished Fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya said during the dialogue.

Chittagong University Professor Muhammad Yeahia Akhter proposed

not to use EVMs in any constituency, as it is a high-tech machine and most voters do not have knowledge about it.

Contacted, BNP Standing Committee Member Amir Khosru Mahmud Chowdhury yesterday said the party's position is very clear: there has to be an election-time neutral government and ballot papers instead of EVMs.

Also, talking to the media at the party's Nayapaltan headquarters, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir questioned, "How come the prime minister says EVMs would be used in all the 300 seats?"

This proves that the ruling party controls the electoral process and it has destroyed the electoral system in a planned way, he added.

The party has repeatedly said it would not participate in any polls overseen by the incumbent government as

"free and fair election is not possible" under it.

The BNP boycotted the January 5, 2014, election demanding a non-partisan interim government to hold the polls. It, however, participated in the last parliamentary polls though its demand was not met.

On Monday, JP Chairman GM Quader told a programme that confusion and distrust were created among political parties centring on the PM's statement on EVM.

"I personally think that there is a huge scope of vote rigging through EVMs, and the system is faulty. But we will take a final stance after discussions in the party forum," he said.

When the EC used EVMs in the city corporation and union parishad elections in the last several months, many voters faced inconveniences as their fingerprints did not match.

On some occasions, voters also alleged that

after their identities were confirmed, agents of the Awami League candidates pressed the button for their electoral symbol of AL.

Asked if the EC was feeling any pressure regarding the EVM issue, Election Commissioner Brigadier General (retd) Ahsan Habib Khan said, "We do not feel any pressure. We will sit with the national technical committee on EVM. We will also sit with experts nominated by political parties to discuss the EVM issue."

EVM Project Director Colonel Syed Rakibul Hasan said currently they have around 1.5 lakh EVMs. "We will need about 4.5 lakh machines for holding elections using this technology in all 300 seats."

Around 2.9 lakh election related officials have been trained on EVMs so far and over 5 lakh trained manpower will be needed to hold elections in all seats using EVMs, he added.

Economists remain sceptical about the rosy picture presented.

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

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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."

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Around 2.9 lakh election

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.

"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 Ashokpur 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, Kushia

Criminals beat up and hacked a contractor to death in Munshiganj Clinic Para area of Chuadanga's Almudanga 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 Almudanga 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.