





27 dead in Delhi fire

Dozens more hurt; 60 to 70 rescued

AGENCIES

Twenty-seven people died and dozens more were injured in a massive fire in a building in the Indian capital New Delhi yesterday, emergency services said.

"The fire has been put out now. The total number of dead is 27. Search operation is on," a fire department official told AFP.

Police are apprehensive that the death toll might go up as a whole floor of the building was yet to be searched.

More than 40 people sustained burns and have been hospitalised. Around 60-70 people have been rescued from the building, the police said.

The commercial building -- which mainly had office space -- is located near Mundka Metro Station in west Delhi.

According to fire

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\$44b deal to buy Twitter 'temporarily on hold'

Says Elon Musk

AFP, New York

Elon Musk yesterday said he was putting a temporary halt on his much-anticipated deal to buy Twitter, sending shares in the social media giant plunging.

Musk, the world's richest man and founder of automaker Tesla, had made the eradication of spam accounts and bots one of the centerpieces of his proposed \$44 billion takeover of Twitter.

When the deal was announced in late April he said he wanted to make Twitter "better than ever" by "defeating the spam bots and authenticating all humans".

But yesterdayhe wrote: "Twitter deal temporarily

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A family of four loading bundles of harvested paddy onto a pickup in Khagail area of Sylhet's Companiganj upazila yesterday. Fearing that persistent thunderstorms and rain will damage the paddy, farmers and their family members have been braving the elements and working tirelessly to harvest the crop and transport it to the safety of their homes.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

STOPOVER ON DHAKA-TORONTO ROUTE

Biman picks Manchester

Commercial flights may begin on June 26; direct flights after Ukraine war ends

RASHIDUL HASAN

Biman Bangladesh Airlines has finally taken a decision to make a "conditional technical stopover" in Manchester for Dhaka-Toronto flights until the Russia-Ukraine war is over.

The national flag carrier said it will operate direct flights on Dhaka-Toronto route after the war ends.

Revealing the latest development, Biman Managing Director and CEO Abu Saleh Mostafa Kamal told The Daily Star recently that the much awaited commercial flight on Dhaka-Toronto route is likely to begin after June 26.

"For the time being, until the Ukraine war ends, we will operate the Dhaka-Toronto flight with a conditional and technical stopover in Manchester for refuelling," said the Biman boss.

Biman officials say the decision was made on the basis of a feasibility study.

A direct flight to Toronto would take around 17 to 18 hours as the Biman will not be using Russian airspace.

Though Russia has no objection to using its airspace, the insurance company concerned didn't want to give insurance coverage in case of

any unwanted incident due to the war.

"That's why we have taken the decision to make a conditional stopover in Manchester," said Saleh.

Besides, a huge amount of fuel will be needed for a flight of 17 to 18 hours. Due to the load factor, the plane will have to carry a limited number of passengers -- not exceeding 120 to 130 -- which will be not viable commercially.

"Considering all this, we have fixed a stopover in Manchester. Besides, there is another reason. As a large number of Bangladeshi expatriates live in Manchester, we are expecting to get passengers on this route while going to Toronto."

The Biman MD also said they are negotiating with the Canadian authority so that the national carrier is allowed to carry passengers from Manchester to Toronto under the fifth freedom agreement.

In the context of commercial aviation, a fifth freedom flight means an airline from one country flies between two others, with the right to transport passengers between them, according to onemileatatime.com.

The Biman MD said after the end of the

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Rejoinder, our reply

The law, justice and parliamentary affairs ministry has sent a rejoinder to a report run by The Daily Star on April 10 under the headline "The 'harasser' doubles down on his act".

We are publishing the full text of the rejoinder along with our reply.

The rejoinder says: In a section of the report, it was stated that, "While he was still undergoing trial for allegedly sexually harassing the woman, Paran was recruited as an assistant judge by the law ministry, much to the dismay of many rights activists."

This is not correct. We are including an explanation of how Md Shah Paran came to be recruited as an assistant judge, and the role of the Law and Justice Division.

The Law and Justice Division said once the Bangladesh Judicial Service Commission completes the recruitment exam for assistant judges, they send recommendations

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EDIBLE OIL CRISIS Drives against hoarders on

Another 3,400 litres of soybean oil seized in two districts

STAR REPORT

The ongoing drive against illegal hoarding of edible oil continued in the country yesterday with another 3,400 litres of oil seized in two districts and hoarders fined Tk1.60 lakh.

After the seizure, the Directorate of National Consumer Rights Protection (DNCRP), an agency of the commerce ministry, sold the cooking oil to people through the hoarders at the price printed on bottles.

In Munshiganj, the DNCRP conducted a three-hour drive and seized 2,100 litres of soybean oil from Shahjalal Store in Rikabibazar, Laxmi Store and Sayeed Store in Mukhtarpur.

Owners of the three shops were also fined Tk 60,000.

The agency officials asked the shop owners to sell the oil at the price printed on bottles. At that time, several hundred people queued up in front of the shops to buy oil.

In Manikganj, the DNCRP seized 1,300 litres of soybean oil from a warehouse in the town yesterday noon.

The warehouse, Kalipada & Sons, was fined Tk1 lakh for illegal hoarding, said Asaduzzaman Rumel, assistant director of DNCRP.



"We have found evidence that the warehouse owner bought the oil at previously fixed price and then stocked it illegally. He was selling the oil at hiked price."

"We have found evidence that the warehouse owner bought the oil at previously fixed price and then stocked it illegally. He was selling the oil at hiked price," said Rumel.

Between Monday and Thursday, the government seized over 6.34 lakh litres of edible oil from warehouses and shops across the country.

On Thursday, officials seized around 3.5 lakh litres of edible oil in eight districts and fined hoarders Tk 4.35 lakh. Two thirds of the recoveries were made in three warehouses in Khulna.

The government launched the drive as cooking oil almost disappeared from retail shops across the country before the Eid on May 3. Two days later, the government hiked the prices.

The price of bottled soybean oil was fixed at Tk 198 a litre, a 23.75 percent rise from the previous price of Tk160. The price of a five-litre container was fixed at Tk 985, up by 29.60 percent from Tk 760. Besides, the price of loose soybean oil was hiked to Tk 180 a litre from Tk 136, an increase of 32.35 percent.

Unscrupulous traders were blamed for hoarding edible oil to create an artificial crisis in the market to be able to sell it at higher prices.

Our correspondents in Munshiganj and Manikganj contributed to this report.

Scientists grow plants in lunar soil

AFP, Washington

That's one small pot of soil, one giant leap for man's knowledge of space agriculture: scientists have for the first time grown plants in lunar soil brought back by astronauts in the Apollo program.

The ground-breaking experiment, detailed in the journal Communications Biology on Thursday, has given researchers hope that it may be possible to one day grow plants directly on the Moon.

That would save future space missions much hassle and expense, facilitating longer and farther trips.

However, according to the study's University of Florida authors, much remains to be studied on the topic, and they intend to leave no stone unturned.

"This research is critical to Nasa's long-term human exploration goals," said Bill Nelson, the head of the US space agency. "We'll need to use resources found on the Moon and Mars to develop food sources

for future astronauts living and operating in deep space."

For their experiment, the researchers used just 12 grams (a few teaspoons) of lunar soil collected from various spots on the Moon during the Apollo 11, 12, and 17 missions.

In tiny thimble-sized pots, they placed about a gram of soil (called "regolith") and added water, then the seeds. They also fed the plants a nutrient solution every day.

The researchers chose to plant arabisopsis thaliana, a relative of mustard greens, because it grows easily and, most importantly, has been studied extensively. Its genetic code and responses to hostile environments -- even in space -- are well known.

As a control group, seeds were also planted in soil from Earth as well as samples imitating lunar and Martian soil.

The result: after two days, everything sprouted, including the lunar samples.

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A firefighter tries to extinguish a fire after a Russian bombing hit the House of Culture in Derhachi, which was used to distribute aid, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, near Kharkiv yesterday. Story on page 2.

PHOTO: REUTERS