



**P3** A zoo where animals will roam free



**P7** Quad opposes change of 'status quo by force'



**P11** Bashundhara Kings win AFC Cup



**B1** Half of mobile users have smartphones



Vehicles caught in a snarl-up on the New Airport Road in the capital's Nikunja area during yesterday's morning rush. Congestion keeps eating up people's time and wastes precious fuel in this city.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

## INFLATION, FOREX PRESSURE Govt moves to rein them in

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The government has ramped up its measures to contain the pressure on foreign currency reserves and inflation, drafting an action plan to discourage non-essential imports and bring relief to the poor and the vulnerable from the spiralling cost of living.

To help people struggling to get essentials, the VAT on the import of refined soybean, palm, rapeseed, canola and olive oil will be withdrawn, said sources. The export of rice bran oil has already been banned.

The government is also trying to stop the decline in foreign reserves by discouraging unnecessary imports and suspending virtually all official tours abroad by government and Bangladesh Bank officials, employees of autonomous, state-owned, semi-government organisations and banks.

Projects with high import components have also been deferred.

The import duty on 135 products, including flowers, fruits, furniture and cosmetics, has been raised to 20 percent. It was zero to three percent before, said the National Board of Revenue (NBR) yesterday.

Apart from discouraging unnecessary imports, it said the increased duty would help develop domestic industries, save valuable foreign exchange reserves and increase revenue.

As of May 19, Bangladesh had \$42.3 billion in reserves – enough to cover just about five months' import bills. In August last year, the reserves hit a record \$48.1 billion.

Contracting remittance inflow since last year and rebounding imports put reserves under pressure, exacerbated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

- Regulatory duties increased on 135 items
- Govt to increase number of import-restricted goods
- Subsidised food to be sold among 13.90 lakh families from June 15
- VAT to be withdrawn on import of refined soybean, palm oil
- Wheat to be imported from India under G-to-G arrangements
- Export of rice bran oil banned

This led to the taka losing its value against the dollar.

The official taka-dollar exchange rate is Tk 87.9, up from Tk 84.8 at the beginning of the fiscal year. However, in the kerb market, the exchange rate is as high as Tk 100 as greenbacks are proving hard to get hold of.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the cabinet meeting on Thursday questioned the necessity of importing foreign fruits, like apples, at a time when summer fruits are aplenty, The Daily Star has learnt from participants at the meeting.

Subsequently, she directed the finance and commerce ministries and the central bank to find ways to cool down the demand for dollars. Hasina, at a meeting of the National Economic Council on May 17, has called upon the people to practise austerity and be careful about spending in the face of a global economic slowdown.

Meanwhile, Bangladesh Bank has also sought the cooperation of the Bangladesh Foreign Exchange Dealers' Association.

In the first nine months of the fiscal year, import payments amounted to \$61.5 billion, up 44 percent from a year earlier.

The volume of imports did not soar as much, but the global inflation tipped the value of imports, particularly of commodities.

The higher import value of commodities means the prices of essentials are racing beyond the means of the poor and the low-income people.

To alleviate their sufferings, the government will be taking a series of initiatives in the coming days, The Daily Star has learnt from commerce ministry officials.

From June 15, the government will start selling foodstuff at subsidised rates among 13.90 lakh families under family cards across the country, except in Dhaka and Barishal cities.

Cardholders can buy two litres of soybean oil, two kgs of lentils and a kg of sugar at subsidised rates from dedicated dealer shops in wards.

The authorities will also import wheat from India under the government-to-government arrangements and the Trading Corporation of Bangladesh will directly buy essentials from external sources from next month.

The authorities have urged businesses to ramp up the import of soybean and other edible oils and requested the agriculture ministry to initiate moves to increase the production of soybean, rapeseeds, and sunflower.

The government will set aside adequate allocation in the upcoming

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## BCL swoops on Chhatra Dal Female activists among those beaten up on DU campus

DU CORRESPONDENT

Some 30 Jatiyatabadi Chhatra Dal members, including a few female activists, were injured as Bangladesh Chhatra League men swooped on them with sticks, iron rods and



BCL men assault JCD leader Tanni Mallick on DU campus yesterday.

PHOTO: GRAB FROM BANGLAVISION TV

machetes on the Dhaka University campus yesterday.

The attack first took place at the Central Shaheed Minar area around 9:30am when JCD men in a procession were trying to enter the campus for holding a pre-scheduled programme.

It resulted in a chase and counter-chase with both sides also throwing brick chips at each other.

Photos and video clips, which were doing the rounds on social media, showed female activists of JCD beaten up by BCL men.

Mansura Alam, member of DU JCD Convening Committee, and Tanni Mallick, joint general secretary of Private University JCD, were among the injured.

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## PADMA BRIDGE OPENING

# June 25: Countdown to dream come true

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Speculation over when the Padma bridge would open has come to an end, and the countdown to the long-awaited day that the country's longest bridge will be open to traffic has begun.

The public can start using the 6.15-kilometre bridge that will connect the capital with the south-western regions from June 25 – just 31 days away.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will inaugurate the bridge at 10:00am on the day, fulfilling the decades-long desire of the people, particularly those from the southern districts.

The PM yesterday fixed the date, which was announced by Road Transport and Bridges Minister Obaidul Quader around 1:00pm.

The minister along with top government officials had met the prime minister at the Gono Bhaban earlier in the day, when she signed the summary setting the date of inauguration.

Hasina rejected a proposal to name bridge after her. The bridge will instead be named the Padma Multipurpose Bridge, Quader said.

Once in service, the bridge will connect the capital with 21 southwestern districts by road and railway, providing relief to tens of thousands who often face hardships while travelling across the river, especially around of major festivals.

The double-decker bridge – a four-lane road on top and broad-gauge single rail track on the bottom – is expected to boost the country's gross domestic product by 1.2 percent.

SPECULATION OVER OPENING DATE OVER

Since installation of the last span of the bridge in December 2020, Quader and other top officials have been saying that the bridge would be opened in June this year.

But Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina last



PM approving the inauguration date.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

month told parliament that the bridge, being built under a Tk 30,193 project, would be opened at the end of the year.

Despite this, different officials continued saying that it would be opened by June, with Quader saying on May 11: "As a minister, after being briefed properly, I am saying the bridge will be opened next month."

And when the Bridge Division issued a circular announcing the toll rates for the bridge on May 17, the notion that the bridge would open sooner rather than later gained strength.

Other than June 25, the ruling Awami

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## Ahead of polls, press freedom more crucial Speakers tell Press Freedom Day event

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Expressing concern over the two proposed acts relating to media freedom, US Ambassador to Bangladesh Peter Haas feared that some of the provisions in the draft acts could be used to intimidate journalists.

"We are concerned about the Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission's draft 'Regulation for Digital, Social Media and Over-the-Top Platforms' and the draft 'Data Protection Act'. While neither draft has been finalised, we fear they contain provisions which could be used to further intimidate journalists and others eager to express themselves," he said.

Addressing a discussion styled "Commemorating World Press Freedom Day 2022" at the EMK Centre in the capital yesterday, he said the US has made its concerns about the Digital Security Act (DSA) clear – both in its Annual Human Rights Report and in meetings with government officials.

"As you all know, this law threatens reporters with criminal prosecution if they publish things the government finds false, offensive, derogatory or defamatory."

Referring to the "Reporters Without Borders World Press Freedom Index," Haas said Bangladesh ranked 162nd among 180 countries, a drop of 10 places compared to the previous year.

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## BNP to talk to other parties about movement

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The BNP has decided to hold talks with other parties to devise a strategy for a united movement against the government.

At a press briefing in party chairperson's Gulshan office yesterday, BNP Secretary General Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir said they made the decision to pursue a national unity for "restoration of democracy in the country."

Asked whether the party would speak to Jamaat-e-Islami, he

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**GREE** গ্রিসি

বিশ্বের ১ নম্বর গ্রিসি নির্মাতা ব্র্যান্ড গ্রি-র সাথে বাসাকে করে তুলুন ভালো বাসা!

ভালোবাসা আর বিস্তৃত বাতাসে পরিবারের সবাইকে যুগ যুগ ধরে আসলে রেখেছে অত্যাধুনিক স্মার্ট ফিচার, অ্যান্টিবায়োটেরিয়াল ফিল্টার, বিদ্যুৎসঞ্চয়ী গ্রিন ইনভারটার টেকনোলজি, পরিবেশবান্ধব গ্যাস ও ৯০ বছরের কম্প্রেশার ওয়ারেন্টি সমৃদ্ধ গ্রি গ্রিসি।

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