

## 2 Bangladeshi policemen go missing in the Netherlands

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Cg

Two police constables who went to the Netherlands for an official training exercise remain missing since May 22, the day before they were supposed to fly back to Bangladesh.

Constables Rasel Chandra Dey and Shah Alam of Chattogram Metropolitan Police (CMP) were in an eight-member police team that went to the European country for a 15-day trip on May 9, officers said.

CMP Commissioner Saleh Mohammed Tanvir said he was not sure whether the two had some kind of an accident or abandoned their team on purpose, and in case of the latter, departmental action will be taken against them.

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A battery-powered rickshaw van with eight passengers plying the second Buriganga bridge in Old Dhaka yesterday. Operation of rickshaw vans on the bridge is forbidden, and such overloading with passengers poses risk of severe injury.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

## India likely to consider limiting rice export

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

After capping the export of sugar from June 1, India is likely to consider a similar measure for rice export in order to ensure adequate availability in the domestic market and prevent a price hike, sources said.

Essential commodity prices, including that of non-Basmati rice, are being monitored by the country's highest quarters and prompt action is likely in case of a hike, they said.

India is the world's second-largest rice producer after China. It exported rice to over 150 countries in 2021-22.

Officials said export restrictions on five products are being considered, of which wheat and sugar have already been covered.

Sources said the ceiling on rice export could be pegged at 10 million tonnes, like that on sugar.

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## SOUTH PACIFIC NATIONS

# China, West vie for influence

Western powers sound alarm as Beijing offers security, free trade agreements

AGENCIES

Western powers sounded the alarm yesterday over leaked plans to dramatically expand China's security and economic reach in the South Pacific, in what one regional leader called a thinly veiled effort to lock island states into "Beijing's orbit".

If approved by Pacific island nations, the wide-ranging draft agreement and a five-year plan, both obtained by AFP, would give China a larger security footprint in a region seen as crucial to the interests of the United States and its allies.

Foreign Minister Wang Yi rejected Western criticism of Beijing's deepening engagement in the Pacific as he launched an eight-nation tour to present the potentially lucrative offer.

"China's cooperation with Pacific Island countries does not target any country," he said in the Solomon Islands' capital Honiara, while warning other countries not to interfere.

"All the Pacific island countries are entitled to make their own choice instead of being just mere followers of others," he told journalists.

The Chinese package would offer 10 small island states millions of dollars in assistance, the prospect of a China-Pacific Islands free trade agreement and access to

China's vast market of 1.4 billion people.

It would also give China the chance to train local police, become involved in local cybersecurity, expand political ties, conduct sensitive marine mapping and gain greater access to natural resources.

The "comprehensive development vision" is believed to be up for approval when Wang meets regional foreign ministers on Monday in Fiji.

"This is China seeking to increase its influence in the region of the world where Australia has been the security partner of choice since the Second World War," Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said.

Australia "needs to respond", he said, outlining a "step up" in Pacific engagement with extra money for defence training, maritime security and infrastructure to combat the effects of climate change.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong flew to Fiji on the same day her Chinese counterpart began his Pacific tour.

Australia had previously not respected Pacific nations' struggle with climate change and rising sea levels, and the new Labor government would do more, including financing climate infrastructure

and offering migration and work pathways to Australia for Pacific citizens, she said in the capital Suva.

New Zealand's Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said the region had no need for Beijing's security arrangements.

US State Department Spokesman Ned Price warned the countries in question to be wary of "shadowy" agreements with China.

The Chinese plan, if approved, would represent a significant change, facilitating the deployment of Chinese police and increased flights between China and the Pacific Islands.

Beijing would appoint a regional envoy, supply training for young Pacific diplomats and provide 2,500 government scholarships.

The Chinese plan is also raising alarm bells in regional capitals.

In a stark letter to fellow Pacific leaders, Federated States of Micronesia President David Panuelo warned the agreement seems "attractive" at first glance, but would allow China to "acquire access and control of our region".

Calling the proposals "disingenuous", Panuelo said they would deliver Chinese influence over government and industries, and allow "mass surveillance" of calls and email.

## All unregistered hospitals

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received within the specified time frame, operations of the private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres will be stopped.

Health directorate officials did not know the exact number of unregistered organisations, but said they will have a better idea once they implement the closure.

Any private healthcare service provider is bound to take licence from the DGHS as per the Medical Practice and Private Clinics and Laboratories (Regulation) Ordinance, 1982.

There are a total of 16,444 private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres across the country, according to the DGHS data compiled manually on November 8 last year.

Of those, 5,577 are private hospitals or clinics, 10,727 are diagnostic centres, and 140 blood banks.

## A farce from the word go

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But hours before the plane left, Biman representatives at a press conference said their assessment showed the direct flight was commercially viable.

After coming back to Dhaka, top officials of Biman and the ministry announced with pride that they have successfully operated a plane on one of the longest routes in aviation history.

Two days later, Biman authorities completely changed their tone, saying the flight was not sustainable.

In late April, the Biman MD said once the Russia-Ukraine war would be over, there would be direct flights

Of all private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres, a total of 10,892 have received their licences, out of 16,132 that have applied via DGHS's online registration system introduced in 2018.

"The objective is clear... to identify unauthorised private hospitals, clinics and diagnostic centres. It is our responsibility," Prof Ahmedul told The Daily Star yesterday.

All divisional health directors attended the meeting, according to DGHS officials.

Strict measures, including revoking licence, will be taken against any organisation and individuals involved in providing anaesthesia and helping OT at private hospitals and clinics with unregistered doctors.

Speaking to this correspondent, a number of health officials said

the high-ups made the decision after the National Human Rights Commission asked the DGHS to take action against those responsible for the death of a pregnant woman and her unborn child while undergoing a Caesarian operation in Narail's Kalia upazila.

Sheuli Begum, 25, and her unborn child died on May 6, when an unregistered health official tried to complete the surgery at the local Hazi Khan Rowshon Ali Hospital and Clinic, which has no authorisation.

Earlier in August 2020, the DGHS had also directed all private healthcare organisations to register online within August 23 same year, and warned of legal action against those unregistered following the period.

The DGHS, however, did not take any major steps.

or any other suitable place," he told The Daily Star, adding that the plan was to launch the first flight on June 28.

**A SHOW OF UNPROFESSIONALISM** Aviation Expert Kazi Wahidul Alam said the continuous changing of decision showed unprofessionalism and lack of a proper feasibility study.

"I will not be surprised if I hear that Biman has again changed its decision," he said.

Another aviation expert, ATM Nazrul Islam said Biman's struggle in finalising its plan showed that it had no proper assessment and planning.

## BCL pounces on JCD, again

FROM PAGE 1

In Khulna, at least 50 BNP men were injured after BCL activists attacked them during a rally yesterday. At one point, some policemen alongside BCL men also vandalised chairs at the rally, witnesses said.

At least 25 BNP men, including Khulna Metropolitan BNP Member Secretary Shafiqul Alam Tuhin, were detained after the incident, which also left three journalists injured.

In Patuakhali, at least 15 JCD and Jubo Dal activists were injured as BCL men attacked a BNP protest rally. Eight of them were admitted to Patuakhali Medical College Hospital, reports our correspondent.

In Manikganj, at least 25-30 BCL men beat up District Jubo Dal leader Rakibul Islam Babu and district Chhatra Dal leader Abdul Khaleq Shuvo with iron rods in front of Devendra College. The two were returning from a protest rally in the afternoon.

Earlier on May 7, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader, after the party's central working committee meeting, said, "About the opposition party, the prime minister said they can hold processions and meetings freely. We don't need to create any obstruction from our side."

**VIOLENCE IN HC AREA** Akhter Hossain, the convener of JCD's DU unit, claimed that BCL activists

fired two bullets during the attack in HC area.

Some witnesses also said they heard gunshots.

Contacted, Saddam Hossain, general secretary of DU unit of BCL, said those who use arms to control politics had brought weapons to carry out attacks.

Witnesses said central BCL vice presidents Rakib Hossain and Tilottama Sikder; Library Affairs Secretary Syed Imam Baker; DU Amar Ekushey Hall unit President Enayet H Manon; Shahidullah Hall unit General Secretary Sharif Ahmed Munim; Surja Sen Hall unit former joint secretary Syed Shariful Alam Shofu, and SM Hall unit former vice-president Milon Khan, were seen leading the BCL groups and taking part in the attack.

The activists of Dhaka City South BCL unit were the "most aggressive" during the attack, according to witnesses.

About the attack in the High Court area, Tilottama told The Daily Star that the BCL group led by Sharif Ahmed Munim chased the JCD men into the court premises.

"I told Munim and his followers not to hit him [Jabul] on his head," she said.

About her action, she said they just "resisted the attack by the JCD men" – a claim repeated by BCL leaders Rakib, Monon and Shariful when contacted by this newspaper.

## POLITICAL PARTY REGISTRATION

### EC to take applications till August 29

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Election Commission yesterday started the process of registering newly formed political parties.

According to a public notification issued by the EC, the parties will be able to submit their applications till August 29.

Those seeking registration as a political party will need to meet at least one of three conditions, it read.

It will have to secure at least one parliament seat with its electoral symbol since the independence of Bangladesh.

It will have to secure five percent of total votes cast in the constituencies in which its candidates took part in any aforesaid parliamentary election.

It will have to set up a functional central office, with a central committee, and have offices at least in one third administrative districts, and offices at least in 100 upazilas or metropolitan thanas.

## Imam gets life term for raping girl in Rangpur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinajpur

A Rangpur court yesterday sentenced an Imam to life term imprisonment for raping a 10-year-old girl in Taraganj upazila in 2020.

The convicted Atikul Islam, of Ghanirampur village in the upazila, was an Imam of Jhakuapara Natun Mosque.

M Ali Ahmed, judge of the Women and Children Repression Prevention Tribunal in Dinajpur, passed the verdict.

Atikul was present at the court while the judgement was delivered.

## Mild heatwave sweeps through 5 districts

UNB, Dhaka

A mild heatwave is sweeping through the districts of Pabna, Chuadanga, Khulna, Patuakhali, and Bagerhat.

The heatwave spell may continue, the weather department said yesterday.

The highest temperature was recorded at 37.2 degrees Celsius in Khulna's Mongla, while the minimum temperature was 22.7 degrees in Chattogram's Cumilla yesterday.

However, a reprieve from the sweltering summer heat is on the way in parts of the country, as the Bangladesh Meteorological Department has predicted showers in the eight divisions in the next 24 hours.

Rain or thundershowers, accompanied by temporary gusty or squally wind, is likely to occur at many places over Rajshahi, Dhaka, Mymensingh, Khulna, Barishal, Chattogram and Sylhet divisions and at a few places over Rangpur division, it said.

Day and night temperatures may remain nearly unchanged, the BMD added.

## Unprecedented

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communities between 500 AD and 1400 AD.

Heiko Prumers, an archaeologist and study co-author from the German Archaeological Institute, said the complexity of these settlements is "mind-blowing".

The site features an unprecedented array of elaborate and intricate structures "unlike any previously discovered" in the region, including 5m high terraces covering 22 hectares – the equivalent of 30 football pitches – and 21m tall conical pyramids, say the scientists, including Jose Iriarte from the University of Exeter in the UK.

Researchers examined six areas within a 4,500sqkm region of the Llanos de Mojos, in the Bolivian Amazon, that belonged to the Casarabe culture.

They also found a vast network of reservoirs,

causeways, and checkpoints, spanning several kilometres at the site.

These latest findings challenge the view of Amazonia as a historically "pristine" landscape.

Scientists say the region was instead home to early urbanism created and managed by indigenous populations for thousands of years.

"We propose that the Casarabe-culture settlement system is a singular form of tropical agrarian low-density urbanism – to our knowledge, the first known case for the entire tropical lowlands of South America," scientists wrote.

They say the indigenous populations employed successful sustainable subsistence strategies that promoted conservationism and maintained the rich biodiversity of the surrounding landscape.

## 'Insufficient'

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the report, adding that searching for forcibly disappeared persons is a continuing obligation.

Prior to this, the government had responded to the UN body only on one occasion – the disappearance of Kalpana Chakma.

The report said that based on the government's response, eight cases can be possibly clarified by it (also called six-month rule).

These cases are that of Mohammed Mahmud Hasan, Mohammed Altaf Howlader, Mohammed Hasinur Rahman, Mohammad Siddiqur Rahman, Mohammad Abdullah

Mohammad Akhter Hossain, Shamim Uddin Prodhan and Mohammad Rafiqul Islam.

The report also states that the UN body transmitted two cases to the government under its "urgent procedure" – those of Imam Mahady Hasan and Mohammad Omar Faroque.

It added that Hasan was allegedly abducted on November 6, 2021, by a group of individuals in plainclothes, presumably affiliated with the Rapid Action Battalion, in Mymensingh's Phulbaria.

Faroque was allegedly arrested on February 5, 2014, by eight Rab members and the Detective Branch of Police during a raid on his relative's house in Chattogram.