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More questions than answers

## CMCH staff brave all odds to help victims

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN, Ctg

With limited capacity, doctors and medical staffers at Chattogram Medical College Hospital are doing their best to treat the victims of BM Container Depot fire.

Samanta Lal Sen, coordinator of Sheikh Hasina National Institute of National Burn and Plastic Surgery, visited the hospital yesterday and requested outsiders not to enter the CMCH burn unit as burn patients could be exposed to infections.

"Doctors and medical staffers of the hospital are capable of fighting the battle ... but the logistics are limited," he told reporters.

A few patients suffered inhalation injuries, but some others are unable to open their eyes, Samanta Lal said, adding that some patients will be released soon.

The doctor said he came  
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Water being sprayed on shipping containers at BM Container Depot in Sitakunda, Chattogram, around 11:00am yesterday. Firefighters were still working to douse the blaze that started Saturday night.

PHOTO: RAJIB RATHAN

## Ctg depot fire yet to be mopped up

Four new containers with chemicals found; death count revised down to 41

STAR REPORT

Firefighters were progressing with caution at the BM Depot in Chattogram yesterday after four containers were found to be filled with hydrogen peroxide, the chemical that could have caused the series of explosions since the fire broke out on Saturday night.

Fire was still burning in some containers and four fire engines were working as of 10:00pm yesterday.

Meanwhile, the authorities have revised the death toll from the fire to 41 from 49.

Lt Col Ariful Islam, commander of Brigade-18 of Bangladesh Army's 24 Infantry Division which is helping with the search and rescue, during a press conference at noon said they found four containers of hydrogen peroxide inside the depot.

"If we can remove the chemical-laden containers, we will be able to finish the operation quickly," he said.

In addition to the Fire Service and Civil Defence, more than 500 members of the Bangladesh Army, Navy, police and Rab continued efforts to deal with the disaster.

Members of the fire service and army said they were facing trouble dousing the fire as they were not certain about the exact location of chemical products inside the depot.

**"Identity of 22 deceased were confirmed and the bodies were handed over to families ... 19 were still unidentified as of 2:30pm."**

At least 40 containers at the depot exploded at different times after the fire broke out.

According to officials of Chattogram Customs House, hydrogen peroxide was in at least 33 of those containers. The chemical-laden containers belonged to Al Razi Chemical Complex Limited, a company owned by BM Container Depot.

Shahadat Hossain, upazila nirbahi officer of Sitakunda, told The Daily Star that a special fire service team from Dhaka was working with seven other firefighting units.

Visiting the spot that resembled a war zone yesterday morning, The Daily Star found many exploded containers, burnt clothes, food products, charred lorries and trucks and plastic products lying scattered across the yard.

Inside the depot, a 650-metre-long shed had also collapsed.

Flames could be seen inside at least 10 containers at different parts of the depot until yesterday afternoon.

The air was thick with strong fumes and black smoke from burnt clothes and containers.

The depot is located on a 23-acre site around half a kilometre from the Dhaka-Chattogram highway.

Sitakunda Circle Additional Superintendent of Police Ashraful Karim said firefighters were facing problems in putting out the fire as no water was left in the six ponds near the depot. The fire service was trying to bring water from ponds farther away, he said.

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## Companies to be allowed to import rice

Says food minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Private companies would be allowed to import rice to keep the price of the staple stable amid the soaring rice price in the market in the peak boro season.

The prime minister will take the final call on this, Food Minister Sadhan Chandra Majumder told journalists following a meeting yesterday of the food planning and monitoring committee, where the preliminary decision was taken.

"We will ensure farmers and other concerned are not affected by the decision."

Rice import will begin as soon as possible and the window for import would be short to save farmers from losses in the coming season.

There is no shortage in rice production but hoarders and unethical businessmen are creating an artificial scarcity, according to Majumder.

The drives against illegal hoarding of rice will continue.

"Already the consumers are getting the benefit of drives. The market will become stable through import,

SEE PAGE 2 COL 3

## Taka sees steepest fall in 16 years

Experts suggest withdrawing interest rate cap on lending

AKM ZAMIR UDDIN

The local currency saw a big dip in its value over the last two days after Bangladesh Bank floated exchange rates of the taka against the US dollar on June 2.

The taka fell by Tk 2.05 to Tk 91.95 per dollar, reflecting the shortage of the greenback in the country's foreign exchange market.

According to BB data, the local currency depreciated by Tk 1.60 against the dollar on Sunday, the biggest fall in a day since 2006. It again lost value by another Tk 0.45 yesterday, the 10th depreciation this year.

The central bank yesterday injected \$130 million into the market to help banks settle their import bills. But the supply could hardly ease the dollar crunch.

The BB has so far injected \$6.33 billion into market this fiscal year. Experts say the central bank should immediately withdraw the interest rate cap on lending as it would help slow down the pace of depreciation of the taka against the dollar.

The BB imposed an interest rate cap of 9 percent on lending in April 2020. All banks have been following the ceiling to disburse loans since then.

Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute of Bangladesh, said the decision to float the exchange rates was a good move, but it's not enough to restore stability in the foreign exchange market.

If the interest rate cap is withdrawn, interest rate on all loans will

SEE PAGE 7 COL 4

## Johnson survives

Wins confidence vote among Tory MPs



REUTERS, London

British Prime Minister Boris Johnson survived a confidence vote yesterday but a rebellion by 148 of his 359 Conservative Party lawmakers dealt a serious blow to his authority.

A majority of the Conservatives' lawmakers - at least 180 - would have had to vote against

SEE PAGE 7 COL 3

## A murder they washed their hands of

Teen dies after going under the knife in hospital shut down by authorities

MOUDUD AHMED SUJAN and AZIBOR RAHMAN

It can be called a collective act of murder at an unlicensed hospital in Magura. But nobody has taken responsibility.

A 13-year-old girl died on Sunday, hours after she underwent a surgery to have her appendix removed at Al-Hera Clinic and Hospital in Shalikhā upazila.

The victim, Nirjala Khatun, a sixth-grader of a madrasa, was the daughter of Nazmul Hossain of Pukuria village in the upazila.

This happened just eight days after the district health authorities shut down the healthcare facility for not having authorisation as part of the health directorate's ongoing countrywide crackdown on illegal private healthcare organisations.

Its owner, Bachchu Mia, went into hiding. Police arrested his wife Karimon Nesa from the hospital.

Health officials later said Karimon, who had introduced herself to police as a staffer of the clinic, is a nurse at Magura Sadar Hospital.

"If anyone runs the hospital ignoring our ban, what can we do?" said Magura Civil Surgeon Shahidullah Dewan.

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## THE FALLEN 9



ALAUDDIN



AMRAN



MITHU DEWAN



MONIRUZZAMAN



NIPON



RAMJANUL



RANA



SALAUDDIN



SHAKIL

## THE MISSING 3



FARIDUZZAMAN



RABIUL



SHAFIUL

## Their sense of duty prevailed over all else

STAR REPORT

For many young people facing unemployment, becoming a firefighter is a dream.

Despite the backbreaking labour and the risks associated, the stability of the job and benefits like monthly rations make it a lucrative deal for those from the lower income brackets. Add to that, heroism is a part of the job.

To bring some solvency to his family is precisely why 22-year-old Rana Miah, from Manikganj, became a firefighter with Sitakunda fire station in November 2020. His family boards with his maternal uncle.

"His father runs a small shop that is not enough to live on. Rana used to earn 16,000 per month and would send most of the sum back home," said his uncle Yusuf Ali.

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## 'Digging deep for healthcare expenses'

People bear 68pc cost out of pocket, speakers tell pre-budget roundtable

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

People bear 68 percent of the country's healthcare expenses out of their pocket, while the government bears only 23 percent, said speakers at a pre-budget roundtable yesterday.

Special aid, NGO spending and contributions by other institutions make up the rest of the expenditure.

Stressing the need to keep seven to eight percent of the total budget for the health sector in the upcoming national budget, they said 45 percent of the total healthcare allocation should be kept for primary treatment.

They also emphasised on proper use of the allocation, as only 51 percent of the health budget's development allocation was spent in the 2019-2020 fiscal; 84 percent of the management allocation was used.

The roundtable was jointly organised by Bangladesh Health Watch, Brac James P Grant School of Public Health, Brac University, and Unnayan Shamannay. It was held at the capital's The Daily Star Centre.

"As citizens bear two-thirds of the healthcare expenditure, increasing the budget is important to reduce out-of-pocket spending," said Prof Atiur Rahman, former governor of Bangladesh Bank, who presented the keynote paper in the programme virtually.

**“As citizens bear two-thirds of the healthcare expenditure, increasing the budget is important to reduce out-of-pocket spending.”**

Prof Atiur Rahman, Former BB governor

Atiur, also chairperson of Unnayan Shamannay, said 67 percent of out-of-pocket expenditure is spent to purchase medicine and other perishable medical products, and 33 percent goes to other healthcare-related expenditure.

Barrister Rumeen Farhana, a BNP lawmaker from the reserved seat, claimed that a person's out-of-pocket expenditure was 60 percent in 2012, which has reached 72 to 74 percent.

According to a policy paper of the government dating back to 2012, the government's plan is to bring personal expenditure on healthcare down to 32 percent by 2032. But it is increasing continuously, she said.

Rumeen said according to the WHO, 49 percent of people do not get quality healthcare services in the country. Besides, in the last 10 months of the current fiscal (2021-2022), only 41 percent of the allocated health budget has been spent so far.

Dr Syed Abdul Hamid of Dhaka University (DU) said the main obstacle to efficient expenditure is procurement-related complexities.

Stressing the need to bring back the centralised system for expenditure, he said the government is failing to spend efficiently after decentralisation.

Dr Habibe Millat, lawmaker from Sirajganj-2, said the health budget definitely needs to be increased, but its proper expenditure in every sector is also essential.

SEE PAGE 4 COL 4



Speakers at the roundtable at The Daily Star Centre yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

**PRAYER TIMING JUNE 7**

	Fazr	Zohr	Asr	Maghrib	Esha
Azan	4-05	12-45	5-00	6-45	8-15
Jamaat	4-40	1-15	5-15	6-50	8-45

SOURCE: ISLAMIC FOUNDATION

## Constable dies as bus hits bike

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A police personnel died after a bus hit his motorcycle in Dhaka's Bangla Motor area under Hatirjheel Police Station yesterday morning.

The deceased was identified as Korban Ali Hossain (35), a constable working as computer operator at Police Telecom Bhaban in Rajarbagh area.

The bus of "Welcome Paribahan" hit Korban's motorcycle as he was heading to office from his Savar residence, said Suman Hossain, a sub-inspector of Hatirjheel police. The constable died on the spot, the SI said.

Police seized the bus but its driver managed to flee.

The body was sent to Dhaka Medical College Hospital morgue for autopsy.



Commuters had to wait for hours on the roads yesterday due to gridlocks all throughout the city. The ongoing demonstrations of RMG workers in Mirpur and start of the work week may have exacerbated the usual traffic situation. This photo was taken from Mirpur Road in Science Lab area yesterday.

PHOTO: RAHSED SHUMON



People from all walks of life took a moment to remember the brave men on duty, lost forever in the flames of the Sitakunda BM Container Depot explosion, by lighting candles at the steps of the Central Shaheed Minar yesterday. Sammilita Sangskritik Jote organised the event.

PHOTO: RAHSED SHUMON



## Online healthcare service for rural people Says PM

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said her government will extend online specialised healthcare services to upazilas so that rural people get treatment from home.

The premier said this while inaugurating the golden jubilee celebration and the 14th convocation of Bangladesh College of Physicians and Surgeons (BCPS) in the capital's Mohakhali. Hasina joined the event virtually from her official residence Gono Bhaban.

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## BRTA to get 96 new staffers against demand for 2,284

Regulatory body struggling to carry out field-level work for manpower crisis

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority (BRTA) is going to get 96 new staffers, but this is unlikely to solve its perennial workforce crisis, especially in regards to field-level work.

Against the demand for 2,284 posts, the road transport and bridges ministry recently created only 90 posts for the regulatory body. They will also get six executive magistrates.

Of the posts, only 16 are for vehicle inspectors and eight for assistant directors, two crucial posts for field-level offices.

Issuing fitness clearance for vehicles is one of the major duties of a vehicle inspector. Currently, only 123 inspectors are struggling to ensure fitness for tens of thousands of vehicles.

Unfit vehicles are one of the main reasons behind road crashes, which saw a sharp rise in the last few years and became a serious concern. At least 641 people were killed in 528 road accidents last month, Road Safety Foundation said yesterday.

However, once the new posts are filled up, BRTA will have a dedicated workforce in every district, a director in every divisional headquarters, and an additional circle in Dhaka.

Currently, BRTA performs its functions through 57 district and five metro offices -- three in Dhaka and two in Chattogram.

Now, there will be a dedicated workforce in Narail, Lalmonirhat, Jhalakathi, Barguna, Panchagarh, Meherpur and Shariatpur. Currently, officials from other circles provide services in these places.

**POOR WORKFORCE HINDERING SERVICES**  
Established in 1987, BRTA deals with a myriad of tasks -- registering vehicles, issuing and renewing driving licences and several more.

But the transport regulator has been facing a severe shortage of staffers and requisite technology

► Ministry recently created 90 posts for BRTA

► Of the posts, 16 for vehicle inspectors, 8 for assistant directors

► BRTA to also get 6 exec magistrates

► 123 vehicle inspectors struggling to carry out work

Once new posts are filled, BRTA to have dedicated workforce in every district, a director in every divisional headquarters, an additional circle in Dhaka

to issue driving licences and vehicle-fitness clearances -- two vital factors for road safety.

BRTA has 823 employees against the sanctioned posts of 702, according to its 2020-21 annual report. It has been asking the ministry for more people since 2016.

In its annual performance agreements, signed with the Road Transport and Highway Division, BRTA said lack of workforce has been its main problem for the last few years.

In January 2013, BRTA made its biggest recruitment in recent times -- 149 people, including 50 vehicle inspectors.

The country then had around 18.5 lakh registered vehicles. Nine years later, the number has shot up to around 52.46 lakh. But BRTA recruited an insignificant number of staffers during his time.

In the last fiscal, vehicle inspectors checked the fitness of 6.75 lakh vehicles.

The inspectors are always under pressure, and the quality of inspections gets compromised often due to this. Moreover, the shortage of inspectors causes service seekers to wait a long time for fitness certificates.

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## 'Increase allocation for education'

CAMPE submits memo to finance minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The upcoming budget should increase allocation in the education sector to make up for the losses during the Covid-19 pandemic, demanded Campaign For Popular Education (CAMPE), an education advocacy and campaign network, yesterday.

CAMPE, in a memorandum submitted to Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal, demanded at least 20 percent of the budget for the education sector, blended learning approach for all institutions and uninterrupted internet services, said CAMPE deputy director KM Enamul Hoque.

It also demanded introduction of special stipend for female students who were victims of

### DEMANDS

- 20pc of budget for edu sector
- Blended learning approach
- Uninterrupted internet service
- Stipend for female students
- Separate commission to appoint teachers

child marriage during the pandemic so that they can continue their education.

The rights group proposed setting up a separate commission to appoint teachers.

CAMPE also made recommendations for a separate pay scale so that dynamic and talented young individuals are encouraged to take teaching as a profession.

The budget allocation for the education sector made up 11.91 percent of the total outlay in the 2020-21 fiscal year.

The share of the education in the GDP stood at 2.08 percent in the previous fiscal year.

The minister is scheduled to place the budget for the 2022-23 fiscal on Thursday.

## FLOUR BALLS FOR MEDICINES!

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

They target medicines that are widely sold in the market, like Naproxen-Plus, Pantonex, Seclor, Monas and Finix. And they make the fake versions using flour and semolina.

Their next step is to lure pharmacy owners, which becomes easier as they halve the prices for them.

And just like that, their fake medicines have successfully penetrated the market.

This is how several organised syndicates are allegedly making and selling fake medicines.

The Detective Branch's Lalbagh division has made over 50 arrests in connection to the syndicates. Fourteen cases have been filed so far against the arrestees, Razib Al Masud, DB deputy commissioner, told this correspondent yesterday.

Interestingly, they have permission from the Directorate General of Drug Administration (DGDA). However, the permission is for manufacturing Unani medicines.

Fake medicines saw a rise in the markets after Unani medicines were out in tablet formats, claimed Razib.

Contacted, Ayub Hossain, director of DGDA, told The Daily Star yesterday that law enforcers are suspecting that those who have taken permission for Unani medicine are making the fake ones.

"We have a strong monitoring system and we take legal action whenever we find any anomalies," said Ayub, also the spokesperson of DGDA. "We coordinate with law enforcers against such illegal activities as well and share information," added Ayub, also the DGDA spokesperson.

**BIGGEST HAUL TO DATE**  
During a special drive on Sunday, DB busted a fake medicine factory in Cumilla and recovered 22 lakh fake medicines from the factory and its warehouse in Savar, making it the biggest drive in recent times.

The arrestees are Morshed Alam Shaon (35), owner of Himalaya Laboratories; Kabir Hossain (44) from Savar's warehouse; Al Amin Chanchal (35),

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'Withdraw case against Afroza Sarkar'

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Nari Sangbadik Kendra, an organisation for the country's women journalists, yesterday demanded immediate withdrawal of all the cases, including the one filed under Digital Security Act against journalist Afroza Sarkar.

The members of the Nari Sangbadik Kendra formed a human chain in front of Jatiya Press Club in this regard. Rangpur-based journalist Afroza was attacked and harassed in September last year, along with some other journalists in a clash on the issue of Rangpur Reporters' Club's election.

"Later the attackers filed the cases against the victims," said Nasimun Ara Haque, president of Bangladesh Nari Sangbadik Kendra.

Some journalists who failed in the election, along with some outsiders, filed the cases, she added.

Nasimun said a case against Afroza was filed under DSA as she gave an interview to a YouTube-based channel about the attack.

Rain-fed Surma overflows again

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Sylhet

Just 10 days after flowing below the danger level, the waters of Surma engorged to the danger level again yesterday morning. The river flowed above the danger level for 13 days till May 26, drowning most upazilas in Sylhet and Sunamganj districts.

A summary report by the Flood Forecasting and Warning Centre mentioned that the water level of all the major rivers of the northeast region, including Surma, Kushiara, Someswari and Sari Gowain, will continue to rise in the next 48 hours.

Asif Ahmed, executive engineer of BWDB in Sylhet, said, "We were expecting the river to cross the danger level a few days later, but it crossed due to heavy rainfall. But the situation is not expected to be similar to the flash flood we experienced recently."

REGENT HOSPITAL INCIDENT Former DG of DGHS claims innocence

COURT CORRESPONDENT

The prosecution yesterday claimed that Abul Kalam Azad, former director general of Directorate General of Health Service (DGHS), and four of his officials made an agreement with Mohammad Shahed, Regent Group's chairperson, for conducting Covid-19 tests.

The four others are former DGHS director (hospitals and clinics) Dr Aminul Hasan, deputy director (hospital-1) Dr Md Younus Ali, assistant director (hospital-1) Dr Md Shafiqur Rahman and research officer Dr Md Didarul Islam.

The defence for others, including Shahed, submitted separate petitions for discharging them. Judge Al Asad Md Asifuzzaman fixed June 12 for passing an order on whether to frame charges against them.



A forensic team of CID collects DNA samples in front of CMCH emergency ward to identify the many victims who perished in the blast at Sitakunda BM Depot. This initiative was taken as most of the victims' bodies couldn't be recognised by family members due to how badly burnt they were. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

'It's our son in the video'

MINU DESHWARA

Following the devastating blast in the Sitakunda BM Depot, 22-year-old depot worker Al Amin went missing. His parents, living in Habiganj's Bagerkhal village under Putuziri union, made repeated attempts to reach him over the phone, but failed.

They were keeping an eye on social media for a minute-to-minute update of the situation. Then they came across a video of Al Amin being carried on a

stretcher with burn injuries and identified him.

However, they couldn't verify which hospital he was being taken to. They are also financially restrained to make a trip to Chattogram and look for their son.

Al Amin's family is now passing days in extreme anxiety and helplessness.

Al Amin is the second of five brothers. He joined the depot as a worker recently, along with his friends Fahim and Rajib.

However, on the dreadful night of the explosion, only Al Amin was on duty among the three. The other two went home after finishing their shift.

"On Sunday night, a local youth saw the video where Al Amin could be seen with burn injuries. He showed us the video. It was indeed our son, with all the burn marks" said a devastated Sujena Begum, Al Amin's mother.

Putuziri Union Member Jasim

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PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

In the early hours, Bangal puts on his boots and sets out to Rajbandh dumping station -- where he collects plastic materials until his basket gets filled. He then sells the lot at different scrap shops in Khulna's Batiaghata upazila, earning Tk 200-250 per day. This photo was taken yesterday.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Corrigendum Notice(2) for Tender e-Tender Notice No. 05/2021-2022. Reference No. 46.02.9108.000.18.02.2022-450. Date: 06/06/2022.

খুলনা শিপইয়ার্ড লিমিটেড. বাংলাদেশ নৌবাহিনী, খুলনা. দরপত্র বিজ্ঞপ্তি. বিসি-১৯/১০৯/২১-২২. ০৭ জুন, ২০২২.

Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. Office of the Executive Engineer Education Engineering Department (EED) Sector-1, Upasahar, Rajshahi. Website: www.eed.rajshahi.gov.bd. e-Tender Notice. Tender Notice No. 28/e-GP/EED/Raj/9 Govt. School/2021-22. Date: 06.06.2022.

খুলনা শিপইয়ার্ড লিমিটেড. বাংলাদেশ নৌবাহিনী, খুলনা. ক্রয় নিলাম বিজ্ঞপ্তি. বিসি-১১৬৯. ডিভিশন (সিএজপি).

সম্মানিত হজযাত্রীদের আন্তরিক মোবারকবাদ. সম্মুখ কেবিনের বিলাসবহুল ও আরামদায়ক আসন অগ্রিম নিশ্চিত করুন. বাংলাদেশ থেকে শুধু যাওয়ার ক্ষেত্রে জনপ্রতি ১৫০ মার্কিন ডলার অথবা সমপরিমাণ টাকা.

Civil Aviation Authority, Bangladesh. Office of the Director, CEMSU, Kurmitola, Dhaka. www.caab.gov.bd. Memo No : 30.31.0000.186.07.004.21 .402. Dated : 6/06/2022. Corrigendum for e-GP Tender Notice.





The Daily Star

FOUNDER EDITOR: LATE S. M. ALI

## A flicker of hope as nation mourns blast victims

People coming in droves to help set inspiring examples

**E**VEN as it continues to churn out stories of heartbreaks, lost love and missed chances, the BM Container Depot blast in Sitakunda is already one of the worst tragedies in recent history. So far, at least 49 people have lost their lives, and more than 450 have been injured. As we mourn these unfortunate deaths and pray for the grieving families, we feel equally angered by the irresponsibility and recklessness that has caused such devastation.

Many things had to go wrong for a tragedy of this scale to occur. We're told that safety measures mandatory for storing chemicals in a depot were not followed. There were no caution signs, for example, so fire-fighters trying to douse the flames did not realise that they were standing right next to dangerous containers that would end up exploding and claiming the lives of nine fire-fighters – the highest from a single event in our country's history. There were many such irregularities at the site that only made things worse.

But perhaps, all things considered and as we try to look ahead, this tragedy does have a silver lining, which comes from the bravery and selfless services of not only the first responders, but of ordinary people as well. Nurses and doctors from all over Chattogram reportedly flocked to the Chittagong Medical College Hospital (CMCH) to provide their services, even in the middle of the night. Many of them showed up of their own volition, because they felt they had to come to the rescue of the victims. They helped, and continue to do so, in handling their treatment and other responsibilities.

Then there were the students and random people who showed up to donate blood to the victims, and help distribute medicine and food to victims and their families. They were motivated by humanitarian reasons, which shows the true character of this nation in the face of tragedies. The number of student and non-student groups that participated – and still are – in the effort to heal the deep wounds inflicted by this catastrophe is truly inspiring. It provides the one thing that this country needs going forward: hope.

So while we call on the authorities to conduct a thorough investigation into the incident and hold those responsible accountable, and make sure that meaningful measures are taken so that such a calamity never befalls this nation again, we salute the first responders – fire-fighters, army personnel and policemen – medical professionals, and ordinary citizens who have all made us proud even when the whole country has been in mourning. It is these gestures, big and small, of humanity, that shows the way even in the darkest of moments.

## Gas price hike totally unacceptable

Govt must leave breathing space for struggling citizens

**A**MID the galloping prices of all essential commodities, the hike of gas prices by 22.8 percent has come as a cruel below-the-belt blow to citizens, especially those belonging to the middle and lower-middle classes. It means that the already shrinking purse of fixed-income groups will get further depleted to pay extra bucks for gas now. Concerned citizens and business leaders have rightly observed that the government could increase its subsidy in the energy sector instead of taking this suicidal decision.

The fear of gas price escalation has been haunting the people since the start of the Ukraine war, and it has finally come true. However, one good news is that the price for compressed natural gas (CNG) hasn't been increased, therefore, CNG-run industries and automobiles will have no excuse to charge extra money like in the past.

The hike is likely to hit some industries particularly hard, for example, fertiliser factories will have to pay Tk 16 per cubic meter of gas instead of Tk 4.45. This big jump in price will create the scope for increasing the price of fertilisers. This will also result in the rise of prices of crops and other agricultural products, and no doubt ordinary consumers and, by extension, people will have to bear the brunt in the end. Similarly, when we see that the tariff for power plants has been increased by 12.8 percent, for large-scale industries by 11.96 percent, for medium-scale industries by 10.09 percent, for tea estates by 11.5 percent, and commercial users like hotels and restaurants by 15.83 percent, we can very well guess that these sectors will ultimately make the consumers pay indirectly for what they will pay to the government.

This is, quite frankly, an anti-people decision and has all the elements for upsetting their family budget at a time when inflation is showing no sign of abating. The Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission's justification – that the government has taken the decision not to give subsidies for any product at the production level, rather it would be extended at the consumers' end – means that the government binned all the recommendations for alternatives offered by the Consumers Association of Bangladesh. Those recommendations included cutting the huge cost of "capacity charge" that the government pays for surplus electricity, as well as reducing dependency on privately-owned quick rental plants and single-cycle power plants which would have saved a lot of money.

Thus, we find the decision to increase the gas price arbitrary, unmerited and unacceptable. We urge the government to revise it in light of the prevailing reality.

# Is the BNP still relevant?



Mohammad Al-Masum Molla is deputy chief reporter at The Daily Star.

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

**W**ITH another general election due next year, nobody really knows whether Bangladesh Nationalist Party (BNP), the main political opposition in the country, will participate in it. The BNP seems adamant about not taking part in any election, as has mostly been the case over the last 13 years that the Awami League-led government has been in power. The BNP's claim is simple: There can never be a free and fair election under the current partisan government.

In all fairness, the claim is quite straightforward for one of the two major political parties in a country where non-partisan interim governments holding elections has been a norm in the past. The BNP wants the current government to hand over election-time ruling duties to a "neutral" administration, which the ruling party refuses to do, out of fear of a repeat of 1/11. As a result, the two political parties' opposing stance on a neutral poll-time government has now probably become the longest standing political stalemate in the history of Bangladesh.

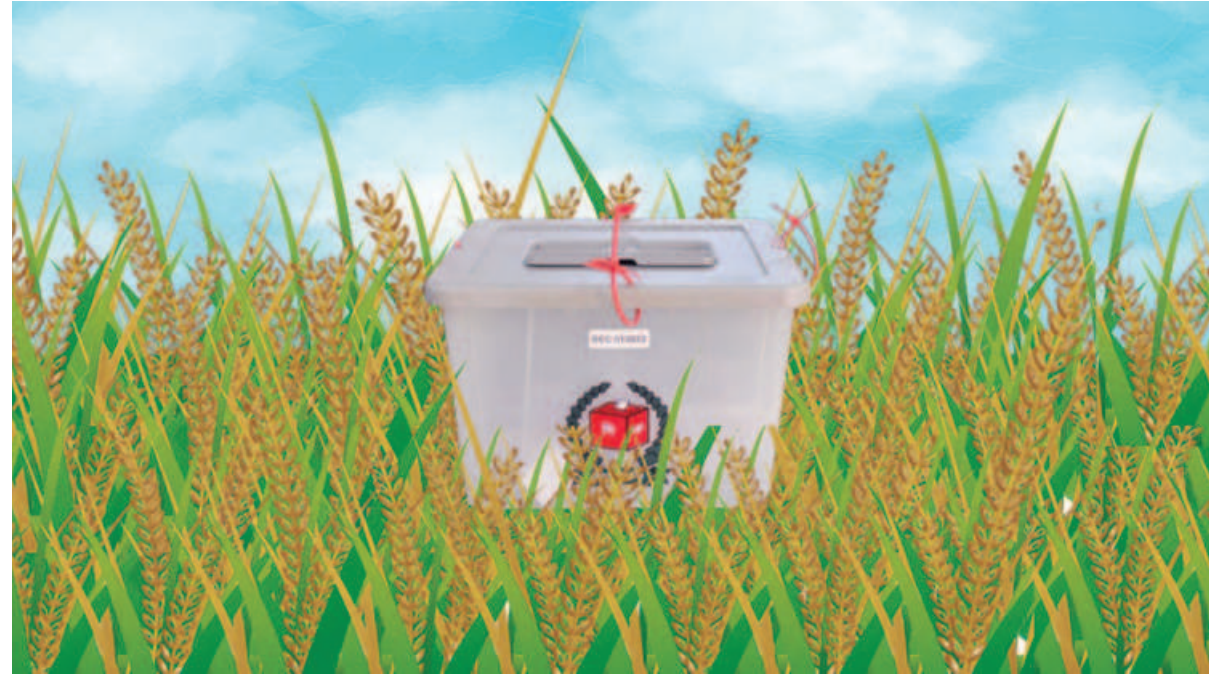
No matter how adamant the BNP seems now, the party did contend in the last general election under the current government four years ago, after a lot of drama. For the most part, they kept on pushing the same agenda: no elections under the incumbent partisan government. But, in what is largely dubbed as a last-minute decision, they went to the polls in 2018 and, quite understandably, the outcome was disastrous: the BNP ended up winning just six seats in an election that was marred by allegations of widespread vote-rigging and engineering. This time around, though, the party seems to have learnt from its mistakes and does not seem likely to make any hasty decision again. Interestingly, the last time the BNP went to an election under a caretaker government, almost 14 years ago, the outcomes were almost equally disastrous: they managed to bag just about a quarter of the 300 seats in parliament.

So, after having experienced both boycotting (2014) and contending (2018) in elections under the current partisan government, and coming out with a bitter taste in the mouth on both occasions, one wonders: Can the BNP really afford another election boycott? Can the party survive in the long run if it continues to

boycott elections?

There aren't any straightforward answers to these questions. Everything the BNP tried in the last 14 years has mostly backfired. They lodged violent street protests on multiple occasions, which resulted in the loss of lives and properties and only brought harsh lashing at home and abroad, but could

However, one big plus for the BNP is that the party has remained more or less united despite all the hardships that they have had to endure since leaving power 17 years ago. In fact, the party is currently going through the roughest patch in its history: Chairperson Khaleda Zia has been in jail for several years; second-in-command Tarique Rahman has been in



▲ VISUAL: TEENI AND TUNI

**After having experienced both boycotting and contending in elections under the current partisan government, and coming out with a bitter taste in the mouth on both occasions, one wonders: Can the BNP really afford another election boycott?**

not stop the Awami League from holding elections.

One stream of thought within the party – endorsed mostly by veteran leaders who have been there since the birth of the party – is to find a place of compromise and join the polls. Their past experience says the current government is extremely unlikely to amend the constitution to reinstate the caretaker government system. So, the best option for the BNP would be to have peaceful political negotiations to find a middle ground, and a way to come out of the longest "power hiatus" in the history of the party by joining the polls.

The second group is relatively younger and is led by Khaleda Zia's exiled son Tarique Rahman. The adamancy of "not joining the polls unless there is a non-partisan caretaker government" is what they endorse. They believe that the party leaders and activists have already paid a high price by being in the opposition and on the run for a long time. So, they have nothing to lose. Many of them have many more years left in their political careers, and hence are ready to invest more time, unlike the other, veteran group, who are mostly nearing the end of their careers and want to finish on a high note.

exile for even longer; there are at least 200,000 political cases against BNP leaders and activists, just to name a few of the predicaments. Everyone thought the party was going to collapse after Khaleda Zia was jailed. But that did not happen – none of the senior leaders left the party.

Another big plus is that, no matter how tough things have been, the BNP is still one of the two most popular political parties in Bangladesh. Even in the remotest corners of the country, devoid of any civic facilities, there is a local committee of the BNP, just like there is one for the Awami League. Despite not being in power for so many years, that has not changed.

Although it seems like a mammoth task in the face of hundreds of thousands of cases hanging over the heads of its leaders and grassroots workers, the BNP needs to somehow find a way to reclaim the strength to channel its grassroots popularity and support into building a national political movement. Because whether they decide to join the polls for a decent result or take to the streets to prevent the government from holding the elections, they will require their grassroots to rise up to the occasion once again.

# Inflation is not going away anytime soon



Dr. Birupaksha Paul is a professor of economics at the State University of New York in Cortland, US, and former chief economist of Bangladesh Bank.

BIRUPAKSHA PAUL

**T**HE world has entered another era of high inflation, and no country can escape from the heat wave of rising prices. The ghost of the 1970s – termed the Great Inflation – seems to be looming on the horizon. The US, with more than eight percent inflation (never seen in 40 years), is on the lead for inflation, as was the case in the 1970s when the inflation spiral was mainly driven by fuel shock. This time, Russia's invasion of Ukraine kicked off the fuel shock too, but the post-pandemic inflation, which most countries are going through, is not fully related to energy shortage. There are other factors which stoked inflation in the first place before President Putin attacked Ukraine. And those factors will keep inflation high for at least two more years.

First, inflation is a common phenomenon after a big recession. The economy enters the phase of recovery. Output goes up. Higher growth leads to lower unemployment – which in turn gives workers higher power of bargaining. Wages go up and cause wage-push inflation. This is demand-driven inflation, which economists describe as the Phillips curve effect. This is not too bad, because people have jobs, pay is higher, and consumers can afford this inflation. The current inflation is partly attributable to the rising phase of the business cycle. This would have happened to all countries anyway after the Covid-led recession, no matter whether other factors had surfaced or not.

Second, the Covid-led recession is unique in that it triggered supply chain disruptions, which we never saw in the wake of any other recessions. Covid is

worse than war. It paused global mobility quite forcibly, but demand remained suppressed. When stricter lockdowns were lifted, the pent-up demand simply exploded. It rushed to hit the market with horrendous desperation, but did not get the products in place. Aggregate demand exceeded aggregate supply, catapulting prices to newer highs every week. This was a golden chance

aggression on Ukraine wouldn't have had much impact on US inflation. Taking a lesson from the 1970s when Middle Eastern countries stopped supplying oil to the US, the American regimes kept on building strategic reserves of oil, which can be as high as 25 percent of their total demand.

Fourth, as the World Economic Outlook (April 2022) claims, inflation is projected at 5.7 percent in advanced economies and 8.7 percent in emerging market and developing economies in 2022. At the end of 2023, inflation is expected to weaken, but it will still be moderately high in developing nations because of the gradual weakening of their local currencies against the US dollar. This is the channel of imported inflation. And that is more so for Bangladesh, whose effort to keep the value of taka artificially high has nosedived and will fail repeatedly at times ahead, making import prices higher in a gradual fashion. The US Federal Reserve's steps to raise policy rates will further strengthen the US dollar.

Finally, inflation is also driven up by fear or panic – a notion dubbed as expectations-augmented inflation. The media with the right information on prices at different markets and the credible steps by the government can dampen this segment to a great extent. All these factors are present in Bangladesh to trigger inflation and also to keep it stubbornly high until the end of 2023. In addition, Bangladesh's special institutional factors – syndication, hoarding, illicit stocks, and corruption – will exacerbate the situation if the government does not rise against the evils of the market.

Prices, once raised, don't tend to fall that smoothly – a notion that economist John Maynard Keynes termed "downward rigidity" or "stickiness of prices." And that is the case for Bangladesh, suggesting the country's inflation will sustain longer even after the compelling factors weaken or disappear.



▲ VISUAL: TEENI AND TUNI

**There are other factors which stoked inflation in the first place before President Putin attacked Ukraine. And those factors will keep inflation high for at least two more years.**

for ballooning up sellers' profits by exploiting the excess demand, and they hit the bull's eye. Since ships transport more than 80 percent of the world's trade volume, and ships take much longer time than flights or trains, the pent-up demand moved fast like a rabbit leaving the turtle-paced supply far behind. And this will continue for more than a year. The typical theory of supply chain management failed because of the very different nature of the recession induced by Covid, never seen before.

Third, the Russia-Ukraine war has disrupted not only fuel and gas, but also hurt grain production and exports, sending global commodity and oil prices to higher levels. Only this reason is the same as what caused hyperinflation in the 1970s. This is more so for European countries – most of which are substantially dependant on Russian oil and commodities. While some European countries are 90 percent dependent on Russian oil and gas, the US dependence is as low as 10 percent. Hence, Putin's



FOREIGN MINISTER'S RESPONSE TO US AMBASSADOR

# A story for all the wrong reasons



KAMAL AHMED

Kamal Ahmed is an independent journalist and writes from London, UK. His twitter handle is @ahmedkal

ON May 31, our diplomat-in-chief, Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen, sent a message to diplomatic correspondents in Dhaka suggesting what questions they should ask the US ambassador. By the time his message was transmitted to journalists, the US ambassador's press event, DCAB Talk, was over, and the minister's note ended up as a story itself. It couldn't be ascertained whether the message was a government advisory or a tutorial note as there was no official explanation about it following the publication of the story.

It was a story for all the wrong reasons. Contents of his note suggest that he was unhappy – perhaps angry, too – at the US ambassador's public comments on the state of democracy, human rights, press freedom and sanctions on Rab. He wrote, "Please, you (the newsmen) ask the US envoy why they cannot stop such extrajudicial killings in their own country. Secondly, about 100,000 US citizens go missing every year. Even children are deprived of reuniting with their Hispanic parents. Ask the US about their problems, not about Bangladesh." In his message, Mr Momen added, "It is not the responsibility of the US to rule our country and its development. If the US wants freedom of press, why have they censored the Russian television channel RT? If they want accountability, why are the US security forces or police not punished or held accountable for killing more than 1,000 citizens, mostly Black and Hispanic, every year?"

Questions suggested by Mr Momen also included, "... if their electoral process is fair, why don't young Americans

believe in their election system and why is there a low turnout among young Americans? Why is there a 25 percent voter turnout in each election? Is it a participatory electoral process?"

These questions, based on half-truths or questionable facts, coming from none other than a person who has spent more than one-third of his



▲ VISUAL: STAR

career in the US, are quite shocking. The foreign minister made his stay in the US a special point when he met Secretary of State Anthony J Blinken on April 4, saying, "I always have some indebtedness to you, because when I was homeless, jobless, and stateless, it is the US that provided me a home and a job, and I am thankful for that." Do we have to believe that he is incapable of differentiating between missing persons and enforced disappearances? The voting statistics he has cited is also far from the truth as the official records show that the lowest

turnout in the US presidential election was 49 percent posted in 1996. In the last presidential election, the turnout was 62 percent.

Questions suggested by Mr Momen were nothing new, rather a repetition of unverified claims made by some politicians in their public speeches. But political speeches are quite different

Press Freedom Index, he said the US had ranked 42nd out of 180 countries, which, according to him, was far from the top. He added, "Frankly, the United States needs to do better." There were admissions, too, about the difficulties the US is facing regarding elections, especially the allegations of fraud made by former President Donald Trump and his followers in the Republican Party.

The biggest problem with these statements, aimed at deflecting the focus of alleged violations of human rights and democratic principles by pointing out failures of others, is that it is a futile exercise and, to some extent, counterproductive. When Ambassador Haas or any other Western diplomat emphasises on a credible election according to international standards, wouldn't it be wiser to respond with expressing commitment to follow such standards? Trying to find justification of a discredited election through pointing out flaws in other countries' elections exposes desperation to deflect the issue.

The same is true when attempts were made to counter issues of human rights abuses, press freedom and accountability by raising questions about intentions and making wild allegations of conspiracies to destabilise the government. It also contradicts assertions by other functionaries of the government that it has been reviewing disputed legislations like the Digital Security Act (DSA) to ensure that it does not become a tool to harass journalists.

The news about the foreign minister's suggested questions to reporters was especially troublesome as he has already earned some notoriety for his diplomatic language. His characterisation of Indo-Bangla relationship or comments about seeking help from India to bring an end to the US sanctions on Rab and importing oil from Russia can be cited here as examples. One may wonder whether these words are advancing our cause and brightening our image abroad, or harming it instead.

## Who is afraid of EVMs and why?



PALLAB BHATTACHARYA

Pallab Bhattacharya is a special correspondent for The Daily Star. He writes from New Delhi, India

INDIA'S Chief Election Commissioner (CEC) Kazi Habibul Awal, in a recent interview with *The Daily Star*, said there was no scope for showing muscle power during voting if the electronic voting machines (EVMs) are used during polls. His remarks have more than anything reignited the debate over the reliability of EVMs in reflecting people's mandate. However, the main opposition party, the BNP, remains sceptical about EVMs as ever.

It is pertinent to turn to India, Bangladesh's closest neighbour and the world's largest democracy, to find out how the Indian Election Commission manages EVMs during state assembly and parliamentary elections, and sustains the sanctity of the adult franchise.

It was in 1982-83 that the Indian Election Commission first used EVMs on an experimental basis in 50 polling stations of Parur assembly constituency in the southern state of Kerala. The Supreme Court had, however, suspended their use in 1984, on the grounds that their usage could not be allowed till the Representation of the People Act, 1951 was amended. It took another four years to amend the law, enabling the use of EVMs with effect from March 15, 1989. Since the year 2000, EVMs have been used in all elections across India – four Lok Sabha and 122 state legislative assembly polls.

But it hasn't been a smooth journey all the way for EVMs in India, as opposition from various quarters persists till today, with some parties continuing to harbour doubts about the possibility of tampering with the machines and how they are transported from booths to strongrooms of the Election Commission, and then to counting centres. In 2018, the apex court rejected a petition seeking to restore ballot papers. Despite that, political parties that have lost the electoral battles have gone public from time to time, airing their suspicion of EVMs and preference for paper ballots.

Politicians have accused parties of tampering with the machines, hacking them or stealing them to influence poll results. But none of them have been proven. Those complaining about EVMs are caught in self-contradiction. For instance, in 2017, after the Aam Aadmi Party's defeat in Punjab assembly elections, the party had demanded a

probe into the alleged malfunctioning of EVMs, and claimed EVMs can be hacked in 90 seconds. AAP legislator Saurabh Bhardwaj even sought to demonstrate in a public session how EVMs can be tampered with. The Election Commission invited all parties to prove their claims, but no political party took up the gauntlet. Five years down the line, the AAP won the Punjab assembly polls earlier this year and assumed power in the state for the first time, and it did not complain about EVMs.

In early 2017, Mayawati's Bahujan Samaj Party was decimated in the Uttar Pradesh assembly polls, prompting her to allege that the BJP had tampered with the EVMs. Mayawati was supported by her rivals, the Samajwadi Party and Congress, but the Election Commission rejected the charges.

A series of setbacks in both national and state-level polls prompted India's main opposition party, the Congress, to discuss the use of EVMs and its possible tampering at its brainstorming session in Udaipur city in May this year. Senior party leader Prithviraj Chavan wanted the party to pass a resolution saying India would return to paper ballots if the Congress returned to power. There were many leaders at the meeting who opposed the use of EVMs.

The Congress needs to be reminded of two important things: i) That the party won several elections, including the two consecutive general elections in 2004 and 2009, with votes cast using EVMs; and ii) Chavan's suggestion that Congress make a promise to switch to paper ballots if the party is voted back to power can happen only through the existing system of general elections using EVMs.

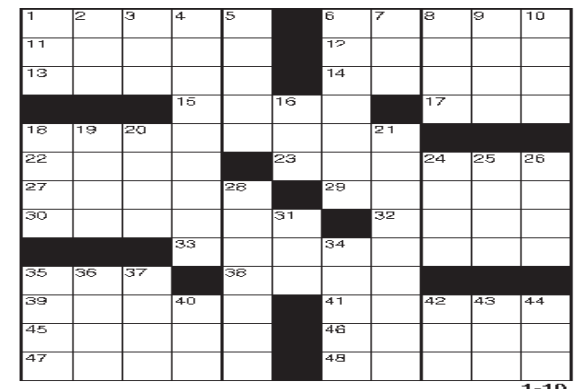
Even at the height of the BJP's supremacy in electoral battles in most parts of India in 2018, Congress won assembly elections in the heartland states of Rajasthan, Chhattisgarh and Madhya Pradesh, defeating the saffron party in votes cast through EVMs. So, is it fair for certain parties to blame the EVMs?

Some parties have often complained about instances of EVMs being found in private vehicles of politicians, but they have been nothing more than stray cases, and certainly not at a scale to vitiate the polling in its entirety. The Indian Election Commission has put in place elaborate measures regarding the safety of EVMs during transportation and against loss or theft. Measures include tracking software, installing GPS devices in vehicles carrying EVMs, and mandatory video recording of the entire process.

The parties also wanted the Election Committee to introduce Voter Verifiable Paper Audit Trail (VVPAT) attached to EVMs for further transparency and verifiability in the poll process. The poll body has done that too.

### CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

- ACROSS**  
1 Comedian Sykes  
6 Petty quarrels  
11 Left, on a liner  
12 Pastel shade  
13 Italian seaport  
14 Spare  
15 Proceed slowly  
17 Make a choice  
18 "Shane" star  
22 "Apollo 13" org.  
23 Discussion sites  
27 Second U.S. president  
29 "I understand!"  
30 Prepare, as a manuscript  
32 Window section  
33 Blockbuster
- DOWN**  
1 Funny fellow  
2 Gorilla, for one  
3 Sine qua  
4 Brag, in a way  
5 To any extent  
6 Iditarod animal  
7 Movies, in slang  
8 Choir voice  
9 Diamond cover  
10 Jazz singing style  
16 Clumsy one  
18 Med. sch. subject  
19 Titled woman  
20 Soon, in memos  
21 Suggest subtly  
24 Nevada neighbor  
25 Short skirt  
26 Dele doer  
28 Indonesian island  
31 Skillet  
34 Small porch  
35 Blue hue  
36 Dip, as a donut  
37 Empire's foes  
40 Collection  
42 Greek vowel  
43 Snare  
44 Hosp. workers



### FRIDAY'S ANSWERS



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## Government of the People's Republic Bangladesh

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Memo No: 46.02.3813.001.12.17-256

Date: 05.06.2022

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Sl No.	Tender ID	Name of Works/Goods	Tender Document last selling	Tender closing & opening
01	705316	Construction of additional class room Chak Bizli GPS under PEDP4, Upazila- Akkelpur, Dist- Joypurhat.	21-June-2022 16:45	21-June-2022 17:30
02	705315	Construction of additional class room Marma GPS under PEDP4, Upazila- Akkelpur, Dist- Joypurhat.	21-June-2022 16:45	21-June-2022 17:30

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Upazila Engineer  
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E-mail: [ue.akkelpur@lged.gov.bd](mailto:ue.akkelpur@lged.gov.bd)



## Flick wants better against England

AFP, Berlin

Germany's coach Hansi Flick said on Monday that his team would need to improve against England's 'extraordinary players' in a Nations League clash in Munich on Tuesday.

Flick praised the English Premier League at his pre-match press conference saying "the quality is very high".

"They have six or seven clubs of almost equal level," said Flick, a former Bayern Munich coach.

Flick said German players who move to the Premier League "take a step up".

Flick's squad contains four players who played for English clubs last season, including three under German coach Thomas Tuchel at Chelsea.

Flick singled out Kai Havertz "who grew up under the influence of Thomas Tuchel."

Midfielder İlkay



Gundogan, who scored twice on the final day of the Premier League season to seal the title for Manchester City, praised England's strength in depth.

"They could form three national teams," he said.

Flick said he was disappointed with a 1-1 draw with Italy in Bologna on Saturday, on the same evening that England lost their group opener 1-0 in Hungary.

"They have extraordinary players and their game is very physical. (Harry) Kane is a world-class striker, he has a huge quality," Flick said.

"It will be a big game for us and it will be important to implement our plan well," said Flick, still undefeated after ten games as Germany coach.

Gundogan, who has been at City since 2016, insisted the historic rivalry between England and Germany was "no longer an issue."

"The respect is there, and in the end it is about sport," he said.

## Shoriful enjoying THE BIG SHIFT

**Pace bowler Shoriful Islam, still recovering from a fractured hand, is set to travel to the West Indies to take part in the limited-overs formats for the Tigers. The 21-year-old has established himself as a vital component for the Tigers across the formats since making his international debut last year and will be hoping to impress further in the coming days. The Daily Star's Mazhar Uddin caught up with the young seamer, speaking to him about his bowling alongside a few other topics during an exclusive interview. The excerpts are below:**

**The Daily Star (DS): How is your hand? Shoriful Islam (SI):** It's much better now. I feel a lot better. Hopefully the plaster will be removed by May 9 and then let's see what happens. I will start rehabilitation and will be a part of the Bangladesh Tigers camp. Since this is my non-bowling arm, I think there won't be much of issue with bowling once I return to training.

**DS: As a fast bowler, how do you adjust as a cross format cricketer who plays all the three formats? SI:** It requires a lot of hard work and determination. I try to give my best during the training sessions. I think it's also about mentality. When you think about your game constantly, it helps you adjust to different situations and conditions. It is not easy at all but this is why I started playing cricket, to represent my country and represent it in all the three formats.

**DS: What are the differences from when you made your international debut from the Under-19 level compared to now? SI:** Nowadays I don't require much time to adjust compared to my early days in international cricket. Since making the

shift from the U-19 level to international cricket, there was a matter of adjustment. There were no experienced bowlers during my U-19 days because we were all the same age but now I am getting a lot of support and guidance from seniors like Taskin (Taskin) and Fizz (Mustafizur Rahman). They constantly share their experience in the dressing room and it actually helps me a lot.

**DS: Did you get a chance to talk to Mustafizur Rahman recently? SI:** Yes, I had a chat with Mustafizur bhai yesterday (Sunday). I always want to know how he adapts during pressure situations. He shares his knowledge and his recent experience in the IPL. The last two days, I worked with Taskin bhai. I am a huge fan of his work ethic and dedication. He puts in a lot of effort in the gym and off the field, which is why he is getting success.

**DS: How are things going with pace-bowling coach Allan Donald? SI:** The best thing about Donald is the way he provides confidence to players, which boosts morale. Since he was a legend of the game, I try to learn the most from him. He is working with my wrist work

but we didn't get enough time to practice because we were busy with matches. I am looking forward to working with him in the coming days.

**DS: You will be touring West Indies for the first time and will feature in the white-ball formats. What are your plans for the tour? SI:** I have never been to the West Indies but I heard pacers gets a lot of assistance in those conditions. Recently, I witnessed spinners also get some purchase from the pitch so I think it will be a sporting wicket. If we can bowl in the right areas, we can do better as a pace-bowling unit.

**DS: What are your strengths as a fast bowler? SI:** I think my main strength is bowling in a specific area consistently and maintaining a tight line and length. You have to be cunning and anticipate what is going in the batter's mind. At times, you need to adapt as the conditions and pitch may not suit you. So, it's important to know your strengths and work accordingly. I normally follow Mustafizur bhai and Taskin bhai and previously I used to follow Mitchell Starc during my childhood days.

## More questions than answers in Shakib's appointment

ABDULLAH AL MEHDI

Usually, when a new Test captain is appointed, the first focus is on the direction he wants to take the team. But Bangladesh's newly instated captain is yet to speak about his plans for the team or the brand of cricket he wants to see it play.

In fact, Shakib Al Hasan left the country on Sunday night without giving any soundbite to the media after being handed the captaincy on Thursday.

His first assignment is the tour of the Windies this month. However, he will join the squad in the Caribbean on June 10, two days after the squad's first practice session on June 8.

On the very day Shakib was announced as captain, the Bangladesh Cricket Board (BCB) President Nazmul Hassan had to comment on the fact that the captain would be available for upcoming Tests, because Shakib had missed quite a few series in the recent past.

On the other hand, the BCB president could not comment on how long the 35-year-old Shakib's captaincy would continue.

There also seems to be no set target for the board or captain to aim towards.

Without Shakib having said anything so far and the board president saying nothing of note, the prevailing culture of unaccountability becomes even more obvious.

There has also been no announcement from the BCB about whether he has submitted any plan for the team's direction.

The BCB president had even remarked on the day of Shakib's appointment that it was hard to have an impact in Test cricket with the Test squad they currently have.

"Right now, the things we need in order to do well in Tests are difficult to accomplish with this squad. As long as they play, that effect [lacking Test mentality] will not go away... I think two years from now, you will see lots of changes [in squad and performances]."

The above statement only points to short term solutions and makes Shakib's appointment appear like a stopgap one. Having appointed Shakib for a third time, are BCB looking for something new or the same reality that held sway during Shakib's last stint? If it is the same old, the resurgence of the pace unit under Mominul Haque will have come to a disastrous end.

During his last stint, Shakib, keen on a heavy focus on playing spinners at home, had said pacers would be used in New Zealand and there was nothing to worry about. That ignored the reality that for pacers to do well abroad, they need matches at home and on pitches that offer them the bare minimum.

Will it be different this time? Will the focus again be just on winning at home despite Bangladesh's greatest Test achievement of winning in New Zealand having been delivered by pacers?

At the moment, there are no answers.



## 'Five-star' Messi overtakes Puskas Neymar closes in on Pele's record

AGENCIES

Argentina striker Lionel Messi scored five goals in a 5-0 friendly win over Estonia on Sunday, a result which helped him overtake Hungary's great Ferenc Puskas among the all-time international top scorers.

The former Barcelona player got to shine once more on Spanish soil in a match played at the El Sadar stadium in the northern city of Pamplona, 430 kilometres from what for 21 years he called home.

The Argentina captain caught up and left behind the former Hungary and - on four occasions - Spain forward, who scored 84 goals in 89 games.

Messi is now three goals behind former Malaysia forward Mokhtar Dahari, in third. Iran's Ali Daei (109) is second, while Portugal's Cristiano Ronaldo remains first with 117 goals.

The Paris St Germain forward also became the first player to have netted five times in both a single European

Cup or Champions League clash and in an international match on a senior level.

He previously found the back of the net five times 10 years ago, when Barcelona hammered Bayer Leverkusen 7-1 in the Champions League last 16 second leg at the Camp Nou.

Lionel Scaloni's side are unbeaten in 33 matches, the last loss a 2-0 defeat to Brazil in the semi-finals of the 2019 Copa America.

Meanwhile, Neymar scored a 77th-minute penalty as Brazil broke down a stubborn Japan 1-0 in Tokyo on Monday to keep their momentum building ahead of the World Cup in Qatar.

The South American heavyweights arrived in Tokyo fresh off a 5-1 thrashing of South Korea in Seoul last week, but Japan proved a tougher nut to crack in front of a full house at the Olympic stadium.

Neymar's goal took him to 74 for his country, just three short of the legendary Pele's all-time record of goals for Brazil.





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# RMG workers' protest for pay hike continues

Govt hints at forming wage board, issue ration cards for them

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As the garment workers continued their protests yesterday demanding pay increases, the government hinted at forming a minimum wage board to fix a new pay structure for them as soon as possible.

Former shipping minister Shajahan Khan gave the hint at a press conference in the capital's Srama Bhaban.

Shajahan, also a former workers' union leader, said the government would provide ration cards to workers soon to enable them to buy some basic commodities at lower prices as their prices have soared.

Before holding the press conference, Shajahan held a tripartite meeting of government high-ups, garment workers' union leaders, and factory owners to discuss the demonstrations by RMG workers and the way forward.

Shajahan, a ruling Awami League lawmaker, was tasked with holding the emergency meeting and press conference regarding the protests as State Minister for Labour and Employment Begum Monnujan Sufian, secretary to the ministry and other senior officials of the ministry were now travelling abroad.

The lawmaker, however, did not give details of when and how the wage board would be formed and how the ration cards would be distributed.

**Earlier, the minimum monthly wage of garment workers was raised to Tk 8,000 in December in 2018.**

He said he would inform Monnujan about the government's plan on ration cards and the new wage board upon her return from a meeting of the International Labour Organisation, now being held in Geneva, Switzerland.

Earlier, the minimum monthly wage of garment workers was raised to Tk 8,000 in December 2018.

The minimum wage was fixed at Tk 5,300 in 2013, up from Tk 3,000 in 2010. The figure was Tk 1,662.50 in 2006, Tk 940 in 1994 and Tk 627 in 1985.

Shajahan blamed the BNP and Jamaat for the workers' demonstrations alleging that the two parties were instigating the workers to take to the streets to dampen the joyous moment of the inauguration of the Padma Bridge, scheduled for June 25.

**AGITATION CONTINUES**

Garment workers staged protests in the capital's Mirpur and Uttara areas yesterday, demanding pay hikes as prices of daily essentials have shot up.

The demonstrations, which began on Thursday, entered fourth day yesterday after a day's break on Friday.

Witnesses said hundreds of workers took to the streets at Mirpur-10 intersection, Mirpur-13, Mirpur-14 and Kachukhet areas around 8:30am. Protesters blocked traffic at Mirpur-13.

ASM Mahtab Uddin, deputy commissioner of Dhaka Metropolitan Police (Mirpur division), said police tried to drive the workers away, but they hurled brick chunks at them.

Law enforcers then used batons, fired sound grenades and teargas shells to disperse the workers, Mahtab told reporters.

The protesters retreated to alleys while police took positions on the main streets. The demonstrators left the alleys around 11:00am, said witnesses.

In Uttara, several hundred garment workers staged protests blocking part of the Dhaka-Mymensingh highway in Azampur area around 10:00am. Protesters hurled brick chunks at several buses. Police later fired teargas shells to disperse the workers around 11:00am.

Kamal Hossain, an RMG worker in Mirpur, said they were demonstrating peacefully, but police attacked them without any provocation.

Protesters also alleged that many of their fellow RMG workers were detained by police in the last few days.



Cops rough up a garment worker after picking him up during a protest in the capital's Mirpur yesterday morning. The workers had been demonstrating for four days straight, demanding an increase in wages in the wake of price hikes of essentials. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

# Govt scraps Odhikar's registration

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has cancelled the registration of non-governmental organisation Odhikar, amidst an ongoing legal battle in this regard.

One of the reasons given for the cancellation was publishing misleading information about various extrajudicial killings, alleged disappearances and murders. These, the government says, severely tarnished Bangladesh's global image.

The comments were made in a letter issued on June 5 and signed by Zinat Ara, the director of registration and audit at the NGO Affairs Bureau. This newspaper has a copy of the letter.

Odhikar is one of the few organisations that have routinely logged cases of enforced disappearances and published quarterly and annual reports detailing the incidents. They also support and mobilise the families of enforced disappearance victims.

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# Newspaper industry in crisis

Say speakers at a roundtable



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh's newspaper industry is going through a crisis because of laws that restrict freedom of speech and the precarious state of the economy, said speakers at a roundtable yesterday.

In the last one and a half years, the price of newsprint, which is the paper used to print newspapers, spiralled from \$570 per tonne to \$1,050.

Together with the devaluation of the exchange rate and the

numerous taxes, the industry is in a bind, they said in a roundtable styled "Upcoming Budget: Problems and Crisis of Newspaper Industries" organised by the Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (NOAB).

The main income of the newspaper comes from the advertisements, which have decreased since the pandemic, said AK Azad, president of NOAB.

On top of that, the newspapers have a Tk 100 crore

advertisement bill pending from the government.

The production cost of a Tk 10 newspaper is Tk 23, and of the Tk 10, the newspaper hawkers take Tk 4 and the publishers get Tk 6, according to Azad, also the publisher of Bangla daily Samakal.

The newspaper industry is different from the rest and its problems are longstanding, Azad said.

"We explained the VAT and tax issues to the NBR [National

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# Untimely death of a dream

AKLAKUR RAHMAN AKASH

She lost her mother at six.

Life was hard but she never gave up. In time, she finished her graduation with outstanding results.

The girl, Puja Sarkar, finally became a scientist at Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission.

Around two years ago, she started her new journey after tying the knot with Tanmoy Majumder, a doctor. They were expecting a baby soon.

"But everything has been taken away in a minute," said Puja's father Amal Sarkar.

Puja is one of the three young scientists of BAEC who died in a tragic accident in Savar on Sunday. The driver of the bus they were in also died.

"As my daughter was deprived of the love and care of her mother, she struggled hard to reach this stage of her career. We are speechless," he told The Daily Star last evening.

Puja's uncle Subrata Nandy, who lives in Canada, wrote a heart-wrenching piece titled

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**PADMA BRIDGE inauguration 18 DAYS TO GO**



PHOTO: REUTERS

A firefighter extinguishes a fire at a warehouse following recent shelling during Ukraine-Russia conflict in Donetsk, Ukraine yesterday.

# MASS MEDIA BILL JS body gets 60 more days to scrutinise

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliamentary standing committee on information and broadcasting ministry was yesterday given 60 more days to scrutinise the much-debated Mass Media Employees (Services Conditions) Bill 2022.

Hasanul Huq Inu, chairman of the committee, sought the time in parliament, which unanimously approved it.

On March 28, Information and Broadcasting Minister Hasan Mahmud placed the bill and it was sent to the parliamentary standing committee for scrutiny.

According to sources at

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# Transparent sub launches in Vietnam

CNN ONLINE

A groundbreaking submersible has welcomed passengers on its first ever public dives in a hugely significant move for submarine tourism.

The Triton DeepView 24, built by Florida-based luxury submersible company Triton Submarines, finally launched at the Vinpearl complex in Hon Tre Island, Vietnam, last month, two years after it was delivered.

The 24-seat vessel, which can reach depths of up to 100 metres (328 feet), features a transparent acrylic hull, providing an incomparable underwater



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