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SHAH CEMENT

Country gets its first female finance secy

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday appointed Fatima Yasmin as the secretary to the Finance Division under the finance ministry.

She is the first female in the country to have been appointed to the post. Fatima had been serving as secretary to Economic Relations Division (ERD) since February 23, 2020. She was the first female in that post too.

The post of the finance secretary fell vacant after Fatima's predecessor, Abdur Rouf Talukdar, was made governor of Bangladesh Bank.

Fatima, who joined Bangladesh Civil Service in 1991, earlier served as vice-chairman of the Export

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An excavator knocking down illegal structures near Baku Shah Hawkers' Market in the capital's Nilkhet area yesterday. The Dhaka South City Corporation conducted the drive to free the area of illegal occupiers.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Padma Bridge ushers in new dawn for South

PM says the region won't be neglected any more



BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said the country's southern region would no longer be neglected as the much-awaited Padma Bridge is set to be opened on June 25.

"People living in the southern region or on the bank of the Padma had always been neglected. Poverty is part of our lives. By the grace of Allah, that situation will not exist any more as we completed the construction of the Padma Bridge facing a huge challenge," she said.

The PM was addressing a programme marking the inauguration of the Palli Janopad, Rangpur and the Bangabandhu Poverty Alleviation and Rural Development Academy (BAPARD), Kotalipara, Gopalganj.

The LGED and cooperatives ministry organised the event at Palli Janopad, Rangpur, and BAPARD, Kotalipara.

Joining the programme virtually from the Gono Bhaban, Hasina said the Padma Bridge would contribute to boosting the national economy, particularly in the south. She said she wanted an improved life for the people of the southern region.

"We are working for the overall development of the people of Bangladesh. We have got recognition as a developing nation and we have to march forward further. Not a single person in the country will remain homeless and hungry."

She requested all not to engage in any race on the Padma Bridge upon its inauguration.

Hasina said she wanted to make a grand celebration of the opening of the Padma Bridge in every district instead of just on the river banks because its construction was a huge challenge.

The PM said the World Bank had stopped funding the Padma Bridge project bringing corruption allegations and filed cases with a Canadian court at the instigation of Nobel laureate Muhammad Yunus and his friend Hillary Clinton.

The Canadian court later passed an order describing the allegations as false, baseless and fabricated.

The premier said Yunus, who got most benefits from the Awami League government, had betrayed the country for staying in the post of

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Covid positivity rate highest in 16 weeks

Health minister urges people to take booster vaccine dose

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

As the country's Covid-19 positivity rate yesterday stood at 5.76 percent -- the highest since February 22, Health Minister Zahid Maleque urged people to take the vaccine booster shots.

The previous day, the rate was 3.88 percent. "Covid-19 transmission has been rising in Bangladesh and the neighbouring country [India]. So, everybody should take the booster doses," the minister said after a meeting with representatives of Bangladesh Association of Pharmaceutical Industries (BAPI) at the secretariat.

The Directorate General of Health Services yesterday reported 357 new cases, the highest after March 8 when 446 cases were recorded. No deaths were reported yesterday.

Since early this month, Covid-19 cases have steadily been rising.

On November 20 last year, the country reported its first day of zero Covid deaths since the pandemic broke out here in March 2020.

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DU BUDGET FOR FY22-23

Only 1.63pc of the outlay set aside for research

DU CORRESPONDENT

The Dhaka University authorities yesterday approved a Tk 922.48 crore budget for the 2022-23 fiscal year, setting aside only Tk 15.5 crore as research grants.

The allocation for the research grants is only 1.63 percent of the total outlay. More than half of the budget will be spent for salaries and pensions of teachers and staffers.

There are 58 research centres at the university and if the amount of grants is divided among them, each would get only Tk 25.94 lakh for research work for a year.

Of the total outlay, around Tk 273 crore -- 29.59 percent -- was allocated for salaries, while Tk 179 crore -- 23.74 percent

-- for pensions and retirement, according to the DU budget book.

Contacted, educationists have expressed dissatisfaction over such a paltry allocation for research grants.

Prof Dr Syed Anwar Husain, a former teacher of the

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university, said usually public universities allocate more for the infrastructure sector rather than for research because those who run the universities are not researchers.

"Their role in research is insignificant and that's why they do not give importance to it," he told The Daily Star.

"On the other hand, from my experience, I do not see quality research being done anywhere [among the public universities in the country]. What is more important than allocation is how the money is being spent."

Prof Kamrul Hassan Mamun, a teacher at physics department of the university, said, "We are performing at the bottom in world rankings. The amount is insufficient for a university that has already observed its centenary."

"We should have significantly increased the allocation for research."

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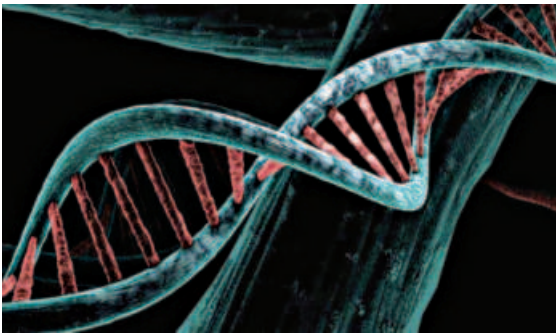
TANGO IN THE SKY ... A pair of Pheasant-tailed Jacanas dance through the air above the Jhajhor Beel in Bogura's Sherpur upazila. Commonly known as "queen of the swamps", female Pheasant-tailed Jacanas are usually seen with male companions during this time of the year as monsoon ushers in their breeding season. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUI

DNA analysis reveals source of Black Death

CNN ONLINE

Tombstones in what's now Kyrgyzstan have revealed tantalising details about the origins of the Black Death, the world's most devastating plague outbreak that is estimated to have killed half of Europe's population in the space of seven years during the Middle Ages.



The source of that pandemic has been debated by historians for centuries, but the inscribed tombstones -- some of which referred to a mysterious pestilence -- and genetic material from bodies exhumed from two grave sites that date back to the 13th century have provided some concrete answers to this long-standing question.

Researchers first excavated the burial sites in the 1880s. The tombstone inscriptions, written in the Syriac language, were painstakingly re-examined in 2017 by historian Phil Slavin, an associate professor at the University of Stirling in Scotland. He noticed that of the 467 burials that were precisely dated, a disproportionate number -- 118 -- were from just two years: 1338 and 1339. It's a revelation he described as

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Western arms 'useless'

Says Russia as EU leaders visit Ukraine

AGENCIES

The Kremlin yesterday warned against new Western weapons supplies to Ukraine as leaders of Germany, France and Italy visited Kyiv in a display of solidarity with a country pleading for weapons to fend off Russia's invasion.

"I would like to hope that the leaders of these three states and the President of Romania will not only focus on supporting Ukraine by further pumping Ukraine with weapons," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said, adding that it would be "absolutely useless and will cause further damage to the country".

French President Emmanuel Macron,

Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Italian premier Mario Draghi, all criticised in the past by Ukraine for support viewed as too cautious, rode into Kyiv on an overnight train yesterday.

"It's an important moment. It's a message of unity we're sending to the Ukrainians," Macron said after pulling into Kyiv along with Scholz and Draghi. They were joined by Romanian President Klaus Iohannis.

On the battlefield, Ukrainian officials said their troops were still holding out against massive Russian bombardment in the eastern city of Severodonetsk, and described new progress in a

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