



46 rail stations shut down for manpower crisis



Ukraine arms spreading to Middle East



NZ's equal pay deal an 'example'



BB toughens rules to curb luxury import



Boats ferrying people at Fenchuganj Bazar in Sylhet district yesterday. The Kushiara river swelled enough to inundate a large part of the upazila for over 20 days. Many flood victims are still in need of clean drinking water.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

Load shedding at specific times likely

PM says she might ask for reduced power generation

UNB, Dhaka

The government is considering reducing electricity production to save the fuel for producing power, said Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday.

Besides, she is thinking of introducing area-based load shedding for a specific time each day, she added.

"Today, I think that I will tell [the authorities concerned] to reduce electricity production for some time [every day] to save the fuel that is used for power generation," she said.

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Now toiletries dearer too

Prices steadily increase

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

Amid rising prices of food essentials and other basic necessities, the recent hike in prices of toiletries and other homecare products has added a new burden for people.

In about six months, almost all soaps, shampoos, toothpastes, detergents, and toilet cleaners became pricier by 10 to 27 percent.

Manufacturers said rising costs of importing raw materials and the devaluation of the taka forced them to increase prices of the products.

As of yesterday, a bar of Lux, weighing 150 grams, rose to Tk 70 from Tk 55, an increase of 27 percent since December 2021, according to Consumers Association of Bangladesh (CAB).

Prices of detergent powder also increased. A kg of Wheel shot up to Tk 115 this month from Tk 100 just last month. Tibet washing powder now sells at Tk 110 per kg, up from Tk 100 in May.

Fahima Khatun, who came to Digubabu market in Narayanganj, said, "From soap, face wash, oil, powder to cosmetics products, prices have gone up in the blink of an eye." Asrafur Islam, a shop owner in Narsingdi's Monipura Bazar, said, "We have nothing to do as we are buying detergent at Tk 10-15 per kg more and selling at the same rate."

At different retail markets in the capital, the correspondent met several sales representatives who warned of fresh hikes.

Mohammad Imon, a shopkeeper in Agargaon, said, "If we want to book toiletry product's orders, we have to pay much higher for the same amount."

Contacted, Golam Kibria Sarkar, senior vice-president (brand) of Kohinoor Chemical Company (Bangladesh) Limited, which owns Tibet, said, "We have had to hike the price gradually in the last five to six months due to the major increase in price of raw materials and packaging."

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ICT CASE

Teacher sent to prison for eight years

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, Ctg

A Chattogram court has awarded a schoolteacher with eight-year imprisonment for hurting religious sentiment.

Dabbrata Das alias Debu Das, 40, was sued under the ICT Act on November 1, 2017. SI Humayun Kabir lodged the case with Hatia Police Station.

According to the case statement, he posted derogatory remarks on Facebook that hurt religious sentiment.

Debu, a teacher of Chowmuhuny High School in Noakhali, was arrested on October 31, 2017.

Judge Mohammad Jahirul Kabir of Chattogram Divisional Cyber Tribunal delivered the verdict in the case on Monday.

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NORTH SOUTH UNIVERSITY SCAMS

When trust takes a back seat

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR and MAHBUBUR RAHMAN KHAN

Thirty years ago, the university was established as a non-profit with the vision to become a centre of excellence in higher education. But some of the trustees allegedly used the North South University to make a quick buck, tarnishing the image of one of the country's best seats of learning.

Misusing power, they allegedly raised their sitting allowance to up to 10 times the approved rate, and got themselves luxury cars at the expense of the students.

They had been facing these allegations for the past several years, but faced no action until the Anti-Corruption Commission sued them over land scams recently.

So far, five NSU trustees and a managing director of a developer company have been accused of misappropriation of about Tk 304 crore.

"The number of accused may increase," said ACC Deputy Director Farid Ahmed Patwary, who filed the case on May 5.

NSU, the first private university in Bangladesh, was established in 1992 as a charitable, non-profit, non-commercial and non-political organisation. It has about 24,600 students now, according to its website.

Its campus is located in the capital's Bashundhara.

THE LAND SCAM

The ACC sued five members of the NSU board of trustees -- Azim Uddin Ahmed, Mohammed Shajahan, Benajir Ahmed, MA Kashem and Rehana Rahman -- and Ashalaya Housing Managing Director Amin Md Hilaly over laundering of about Tk 304 crore. All the five trustees are businesspeople.

Shajahan, Benajir, Kashem and Rehana had sought anticipatory bail from the High Court, but the court sent them to jail on May 22.

A Dhaka court on June 30 also rejected bail pleas of the four.

Patwary, the ACC DD who is investigating the case, interrogated the four suspects at jail gate in late May.

"They've given us some important information that will help prove the case," he said, without going into details.

"Azim Uddin and Hilaly are in hiding," Patwary said last month.

The HC issued a travel ban so they cannot leave the country, he added.

Barrister Mizan Sayeed, who represented the four trustees at the High Court for the bail hearing, said the allegations against his clients were untrue and fabricated.

"They are victims of a conspiracy by a vested quarter," he said, but did not elaborate.

Investigators said they unearthed a nexus between Hilaly and some members of the trustee board.

"Without the consent of the university [NSU] syndicate, University Grants Commission and the education ministry, the board of trustees illegally paid an additional Tk 303.82 crore for the development of the campus on the 9,096.88 decimals of land," reads the case document.

The NSU and the developer company struck a primary deal on July 27, 2014, for buying land in Jangir, Gutia and Pitalganj mouzas of Rugganj upazila of Narayanganj for campus development.

On the same day, Hilaly deposited Tk 9 crore into 13 separate FDR accounts of Benajir Ahmed in the same branch of a private bank.

Within 10 days, another Tk 11 crore was deposited in Benajir's FDR accounts. During April-August of 2016, his FDR accounts swelled by another Tk 8 crore, taking his total receipts from the developer before and after the land purchase to Tk 28 crore, investigators said.

Hilaly similarly gave Tk 29.5 crore to Hashem, Tk 14 crore to Azim, Tk 9 crore to MA Kashem and Tk 11 crore to Rehana in bribes, according to the case statement.

Twenty-one months after the primary deal, the developer sold

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Omicron's sub-type spreading fast

Finds icddr,b study

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

New versions of the Omicron variant of coronavirus, BA.4 and BA.5, are spreading rapidly in the country, causing the current surge in new cases, finds a study of the icddr,b.

Between May 14 and June 24, BA.5 was the most predominant subvariant, according to the findings published on icddr,b website yesterday.

During this period, researchers identified 51 instances of BA.5 and one instance of BA.2 subvariants through genome sequencing of 52 samples.

The first case of BA.5 was detected in Dhaka on May 19.

Clinical data and vaccination history of 40 BA.5 patients were available.

Thirty-nine patients had mild to moderate symptoms, and one had none. At least 11 were infected for the second time and seven for the third time. Thirty-eight patients had at least one dose of a vaccine. At least 16 had received a booster shot, 21 had two doses, and one had one shot.

None of the patients had any foreign travel history and only one was hospitalised for a day. The severity of the symptoms caused by BA.5 among the study population was low.

"The recent countrywide upsurge of Covid-19 cases as well as hospitalisation, however, warrants continuation of public health and social measures...", said icddr,b.

To stay safe, icddr,b recommended that people get vaccinated, keep wearing well-fitted facemasks, maintain physical distancing, and wash hands with soap and water frequently.

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Though Eid-ul-Azha is just a few days away, the crowd at Kamalapur Railway Station in the capital was relatively thin yesterday. Usually, the place is teeming with holidaymakers waiting to head to their destinations. Many people from southwestern districts opted to travel by road this Eid so that they could cross the recently-inaugurated Padma Bridge.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

RMG worker dies after being 'denied sick leave'

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Gazipur

A man died while working in a garments factory after the authorities allegedly did not allow him to take sick leave in Gazipur Sadar upazila yesterday.

Jahidul Islam, 27, a sewing operator of Golden Refit Garments, collapsed on the factory floor around 3:00pm on Monday.

Monayem Hossain, assistant superintendent of Gazipur Industrial Police, confirmed the incident.

The factory workers claimed Jahidul was ill for around the last five days. Despite repeated requests for leave, the factory's line chief Kamrul Islam did not grant him one as the administration had instructed not to allow anyone to take leave before the upcoming Eid-ul-Azha.

Though he was sick, Jahidul joined work on Monday, said his co-

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