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Construction work of Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Railway Bridge is in progress over the Jamuna river. The photo was taken recently at the eastern side of the river. The bridge will be a major leap for railroad communication in the country.

PHOTO: SK ENAMUL HAQ

DEFENCE CARGO

Plane flying to Dhaka crashes in Greece

All 8 crew members killed

STAR REPORT

An aircraft carrying training mortar shells procured from Serbia for the Bangladesh Army and Border Guard Bangladesh crashed in northern Greece on Saturday killing all eight crew members on board.

A press release issued by the Inter Service Public Relation Directorate (ISPR) yesterday said there was no weapon in the consignment, which was insured.

It also said the shells were being brought in through a contractor who had won the Directorate General of Defense Purchase procurement contract.

A Reuters report, quoting Serbian authorities and Meridian airline, yesterday said a Ukrainian cargo plane carrying munitions from Serbia to Bangladesh crashed near the city of Kavala in northern Greece late on Saturday.

Drone images from the scene showed smouldering debris from the Antonov An-12 aircraft strewn in fields. Greek

authorities said there were eight crew members on board and a Ukrainian foreign ministry spokesman said they were all Ukrainian citizens.

Ukrainian-based airline Meridian, which operated the aircraft, said all crew members were killed in the crash, said the Reuters report.

Serbia's defence minister said the plane was carrying 11.5 tonnes of products, including mortar and training shells, made by its defence industry. The buyer of the cargo was the defence ministry of Bangladesh, he said.

Denys Bogdanovych, Meridian's general director, confirmed Serbia's account of events. "This is not related to Ukraine or Russia," Bogdanovych told Reuters by telephone.

Witnesses said the aircraft came down in a ball of flames before exploding on impact in corn fields around midnight local time. Earlier the pilot had reported engine trouble and had requested an emergency landing.

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Fuel stocks dwindling

BPC struggles to buy fuel for dollar crunch; PMO holds emergency meeting today

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Uncertainty looms over the country's fuel stock as the Bangladesh Petroleum Corporation is finding it difficult to import fuel amid a dollar shortage at local banks.

The corporation currently has less than 40 days' worth of fuel reserves, which is well below the standard practice of keeping 40-45 days' worth of stock, BPC officials told this correspondent yesterday.

An emergency meeting will be held today at the PMO to review "the whole scenario of energy supply, power generation and distribution".

Banks are not being able to open letters of credit to import petroleum because of an acute shortage of dollars in the country's forex market, said a "very urgent" letter sent on July 5 by the energy and mineral resources division to the finance ministry, PMO and economic relations division.

According to the letter, the BPC wrote several times to Bangladesh Bank and the financial institutions division of the finance ministry in May and June, requesting adequate foreign exchange.

The fuel required to meet local demand is almost entirely imported, according to the July 5 letter.

At today's meeting, BPC officials may propose reducing the number of vehicles on the roads by having vehicles with odd and even registration numbers plying roads on alternate days, and also seek to curtail office and school hours, officials said.

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The aim is to reduce the demand for fuel by at least 50 percent, BPC sources said.

Today's emergency meeting which will be attended by Principal Secretary to the PM Ahmad Kaikaus, PM's Energy Adviser Dr Tawfiq-e Elahi Chowdhury and the state minister for power, energy and mineral resources, the Bangladesh Bank governor, senior secretaries of PMO and energy division, secretary of power division, high-ups of BPC, Petrobangla, Bangladesh Power Development Board, Bangladesh Rural Electrification Board, etc.

At another high-level meeting on July 7, the participants recommended setting thermostats at 25 degrees Celsius at every government office, reducing use of air conditioners at religious establishments, and wrapping up social events like weddings by 7:00pm to reduce the power consumption.

About 44 percent of fuel is consumed by the power sector and 40 percent is used by the transport sector, according to the BPC. Another nine percent is used in the agriculture sector and four percent in the industries.

In the 2020-21 fiscal year, the country consumed a total of 44.8 lakh tonnes of diesel, 43.5 lakh tonnes of furnace oil, 3.7 lakh tonnes of petrol, 2.9 lakh tonnes of octane, and 2.3 lakh tonnes of jet fuel, etc., according to Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission.

In the letter sent on July 5, it was mentioned that BPC usually needs to open 16-17 LCs every month in Sonali

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Metro now set to cost 50pc more

Deadline too may be stretched by a year and half

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY *and* REJAUL KARIM BYRON

With the partial launch of the country's first ever metro rail only five months away, the project cost is set to rise by more than half, and the deadline is also going to be extended by a year and half.

The project -- formally known as Mass Rapid Transit Line-6 or MRT Line-6 -- is to go through a major revision mainly due to changes in the design of metro stations and expansion of the elevated rail line up to Kamalapur from Motijheel.

According to the revision proposal that the Road Transport and Highways Division sent to the Planning Commission, the project cost will rise by 52.25 percent or Tk 11,487 crore to Tk 33,472 crore. The original cost was Tk 21, 985 crore.

The deadline for completion of the MRT Line-6 -- one of the eight fast-track government projects -- will be December 2025 instead of June 2024.

The proposal is likely to be placed at the next meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecnec) tomorrow, said MAN Siddique, managing director of Dhaka Mass Transit Company Ltd.

If the proposal is approved, the MRT Line-6 will be the seventh fast-track project to have gone through revision at least once. Only the Rooppur nuclear power plant project has not gone through any revision.

Uncertainty over funding; complexity over design, planning and land acquisition; lack of capability and accountability of implementing agencies; and the Covid pandemic are to blame for the time and cost overruns.

REVISION PROPOSAL

Revised cost **Tk 33,472cr**

Original cost **Tk 21,985cr**

NEW DEADLINE DECEMBER 2025

The development comes at a time when deadline extension and cost escalation of development projects have become a major concern with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressing discontent over it on several occasions.

Approved in December 2012, the project, funded with soft loans from Japan, didn't take off until 2016.

Overall progress of the project was 81.19

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Soybean oil price drops by Tk 14 a litre

REFAYET ULLAH MIRDHA

The bottled soybean oil price has been reduced by Tk 14 a litre at retail.

The new price, Tk 185, is supposed to come in effect today, according to Senior Commerce Secretary Tapan Kanti Ghosh.

However, compared to the price drop in the international market, the 7 percent reduction seems inadequate. Unrefined soybean oil prices fell by 26 percent in the international market since June.

Each tonne of crude soybean oil prices dropped from $1,800 in April-June to $1,330 yesterday.

The millers also agreed to reduce the prices of palm oil by Tk 6 a litre to Tk 152, Ghosh said.

As per the new price, a five litre bottle of soybean oil will sell for Tk 910 from the current Tk 980.

Edible oil prices are likely to fall significantly next month when the shipments of low-priced unrefined oil

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NARAIL MAYHEM

Sahapara still stalked by fear

DIPANKAR ROY

Shibnath Saha's life utterly changed on Friday evening. The 70-year-old man, his wife, two sons and their wives, and three grandchildren lived in the house.

But only he and his ailing wife Arpana Rani Saha are now in the house, which bears witness to Friday's communal attack on properties owned by Hindu people in Sahapara area of Lohagara, Narail. The rest of Shibnath's family members have fled the area out of fear for their lives.

Three homes and dozens of shops were vandalised or burnt down in Sahapara on Friday. The attacks were carried out by mobs who said their religious feelings were hurt by a Facebook post made by someone from the neighbourhood.

"I don't know how my sons, daughters-in-law and grandchildren are passing their days away from home," said Shibnath.

Almost all the women and children of the 108 Hindu families have left their homes amid the mayhem.

Their fear intensified after miscreants stole two cows from the house of Sochidanada Roy on Saturday night.

There are around 300 stores owned by Hindu individuals in Dighalia Bazar which is close to Sahapara. Almost all the shops remained closed yesterday.

"My shop was looted that day. Everything has been damaged. I wouldn't dare reopening my shop anytime soon," said Nitya Gopal Saha, a grocery shop owner.

He also alleged that some of the attackers demanded Tk 5 lakh moments before his shops and house were vandalised.

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The usual tailback during the morning rush hour at Banani yesterday. Streets in the capital saw light traffic for days as many left for their home districts for Eid.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

MIRACULOUS BIRTH

Uncle assumes responsibility for newborn, siblings

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Mymensingh*

The baby born miraculously at the site of accident and her two minor siblings from Mymensingh's Trishal upazila will be taken care of by a relative.

The three were left orphaned on Saturday after an onion-laden truck ran over their parents and their three-year-old sister in the Court Bhaban area.

Their father Jahangir Alam and sister Sanjida died on the spot, while the impact of the collision pushed the baby out of their eight-month pregnant mother Ratna Begum's womb. She died soon after giving birth.

Locals rescued the newborn and rushed her to Trishal Upazila Health Complex, where the on-duty doctor referred her to Community Based Medical College Hospital,

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