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Hasina writes to Mamata

Intends to meet the West Bengal CM during her upcoming India visit



OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

Ahead of her official visit to India in the first week of September, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina expressed hope to meet West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee whose consent is required for inking the Teesta water-sharing deal.

"I hope that during my scheduled tour of India in September, 2022, there will be an opportunity to meet you," Hasina said in a letter to Mamata on July 12.

Although the dates of Hasina's India visit are yet to be officially announced, she is expected to be on tour on September 5-7.

The Bangladesh PM in her letter

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Hundreds of train passengers stuck on the Dhaka Airport Railway Station platform as angry students blocked the Nilsagar Express Train coming in from Kamalapur yesterday morning, as part of an ongoing protest against railway irregularities. Train movement was halted there from 9:00am to 12:20pm, causing sufferings to regular passengers. Related story on Page 3. PHOTO: PALASH KHAN

ASHRAYAN PROJECT-2 'I'll invite the PM to our home!'

Says an ecstatic 9-year-old upon getting new home in Panchagarh

ASHIK ABDULLAH APU and MIRZA SHAKIL

"I am Sheikh Hasina's Jannat!"

This is the sweet response of a nine-year old whenever her name is asked.

Jannat's family, in Kajaldighi of Panchagarh's Boda upazila, was gifted a semi-pucca house and two decimals of land under the government's Ashrayan 2 project - aimed at providing homes to the country's homeless people.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will officially inaugurate the second part of the project's third phase today.

"I used to see other people's homes and dreamed of having one of our own someday. The prime minister has fulfilled that dream. I love her very much and will invite her to our house in Panchagarh whenever I get the chance," Jannat, a third grader of Kajaldighi Government Primary



Jannat

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ENERGY CRISIS

Shutting diesel-run plants won't do much

Top energy expert tells Star

SADI MUHAMMAD ALOK

A top energy expert has expressed doubt over whether the government's actions to solve the energy crisis will bear much fruit, and said people with lower incomes will be hit harder by measures such as load shedding.

While speaking to The Daily Star yesterday, Prof M Shamsul Alam, Consumer Association of Bangladesh's (CAB's) adviser and energy expert, was also unsure whether temporarily shutting down diesel-fired power plants would have much impact on saving fuel.

"The diesel-run power plants are being shut down to save expenditure. However, whenever there will be load shedding, use of generators will increase. As a result, energy consumption will increase, too.

"The government cannot or will not control this. The rich people and government officials will save themselves from load shedding by using generators and Instant Power Suppliers (IPSs).

"Ultimately, the brunt of load shedding will be borne by people with low-income levels. They will endure this pressure. In a nutshell, 70 to 80 percent of the country's

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Prof M Shamsul Alam

1,543 GOVT PROJECTS

Over a third missed deadline last fiscal year

Likely to see cost escalation

TUHN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

At least 552 projects that were supposed to be finished by June this year could not meet deadlines.

They constitute 36 percent of the total 1,543 projects that got Annual Development Programme (ADP) allocation in the last fiscal year.

The number of projects that missed their deadlines in the 2021-22 fiscal year is 63 percent higher than the number (337) in the previous fiscal year, show planning ministry documents.

Having missed the deadlines, authorities have to seek time extensions and, as delays usually go hand in hand with cost increases, this will likely escalate the costs of many of the projects.

Most of the projects involve construction of roads, bridges, rail lines, while some others are technical assistance projects.

The cost overrun of development projects have become a major concern, with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina on several occasions giving directives to stop wastage of state resources.

The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) recently said the government is making significant investments in public infrastructure projects (PIPs), but a lack of good governance in project implementation undermines efficiency.

The think tank identified weak feasibility studies, coordination failure, delays in land acquisition,

Having missed the deadlines, authorities have to seek time extensions and, as delays usually go hand in hand with cost increases, this will likely escalate the costs of many of the projects.

and frequent changes of project directors as some of the key reasons behind the poor governance in PIP implementation.

Because of the cost escalations and deadline extensions, the majority of the projects fail to attain their goals that include the

internal rate of return, financial rate of return and the economic rate of return.

The National Economic Council at a meeting in May this year directed that the 552 projects which failed to meet the deadlines be included in the ADP for 2022-23 fiscal year, and asked authorities to extend their deadlines by June 30 - the last day of the 2021-22 fiscal year.

The Planning Commission in a letter last month asked all secretaries of ministries and divisions concerned to complete necessary procedures for time extension by June 30, shows a planning ministry document.

Different implementation agencies of those projects have sent proposals to the planning ministry, but deadlines of many of the projects have yet to be extended.

"We have already sent time extension proposals for the projects concerned. However, the process takes time and so deadlines are being extended gradually," said an official of roads and highways department, one of the major implementing agencies.

Scientists discover two new giant crocodile species

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have discovered two new crocodile species that lived between 18 and 15 million years ago and likely preyed on early humans, an advance that sheds more light on the evolution of the reptiles.

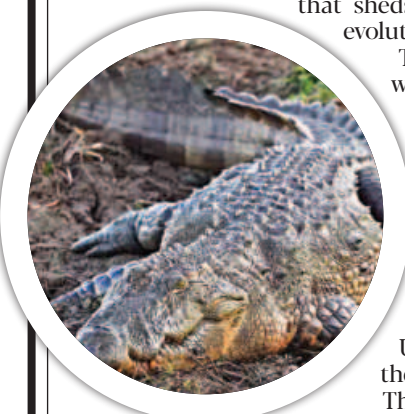
These crocodiles, which may have grown to over 3.5m (12 ft) in size, formerly inhabited east Africa between 18 and 15 million years ago before "inexplicably becoming extinct", scientists from the University of Iowa in the US say.

The new species - Kinyang mabokoensis and Kinyang tchernovi - are similar to the dwarf crocodiles found in central and western Africa, according to the study, published in the journal The Anatomical Record.

However, while the dwarf crocodiles rarely grow longer than 4 or 5 ft, scientists say their prehistoric ancestors could reach lengths of up to 12 ft (3.6m), making them among the most dangerous threats to any animal they came across.

"These were the biggest predators our ancestors faced," study co-author Christopher Brochu, professor in the Department of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Iowa,

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Narco trade rose alarmingly since Rohingya influx

Say researchers, officials

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Trafficking of illegal drugs, notably methamphetamine or 'yaba', from Myanmar to all its neighbouring countries has risen alarmingly since the 2017 Rohingya influx in Bangladesh.

This poses serious threats to security in the region, researchers and officials have said.

They called upon the international community to take urgent action against Myanmar - producer and supplier of the drug that harms consumers both physically and mentally.

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan Kamal said police across Chattogram division seized 34.76 lakh Yaba pills in 2016. The number increased to 1.2 crore in 2018 and 2.59 crore in 2021.

"The Rohingyas are not the consumers but the carriers," he said at a seminar, organised by the Diplomats World Publication on "Rohingyas & Narco Terrorism", at the capital's Radisson Blu Water Garden yesterday.

Kamal said the long, porous Bangladesh-Myanmar border is used for drug trafficking, which is leading to more criminal activities. Those who become addicted may also become easy prey for extremist organisations.

Imtiaz Ahmed, professor at Dhaka University's international relations, in his keynote speech, said

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A fisherman works on his nets on the Chila Canal in Bagerhat's Mongla. As the ongoing 65-day fishing ban is about to end on July 23, fishermen across the country are readying the equipment they need to head back out to the sea. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

TWITTER POST Alt News co-founder gets interim bail

REUTERS, New Delhi

India's Supreme Court yesterday ordered the release on bail

of a prominent journalist arrested last month over what police said was a "highly provocative" 2018 tweet aimed at straining ties between majority Hindus and minority Muslims.

Mohammed Zubair, a co-founder of fact-checking website Alt News and vocal critic of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was arrested after an anonymous Twitter user lodged a complaint over the four-year-old post.

While granting Zubair bail, the judges stated that "power of arrests must be pursued sparingly".

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