



P5 'Landslide took away everything we had'



P7 Wickremesinghe sworn in as Sri Lanka president



P8 Looking at Bangladesh thru minorities' eyes



P11 Asia success in Kings' vision



Chimneys of brick kilns as far as the eyes can see on the Buriganga in Baktarpur area of Narayanganj yesterday. Brick kilns are not allowed within a kilometre of a recognised ecologically critical area which the river has been declared.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Largest loan from IMF on the cards

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The International Monetary Fund is expecting a formal request for a loan from Bangladesh soon to provide a buffer to the delicate foreign currency reserves amid global economic volatility even though the government remains in two minds about it.

"The authorities are expected to send a request letter to start the programme negotiation," said the visiting IMF mission in its concluding remarks yesterday after wrapping up its nine day tour.

The finance ministry is now awaiting the green light from the highest authority to formally approach the IMF for the loan, The Daily Star has learnt from officials involved with the proceedings.

The loan amount that would be sought will be decided then, said a finance ministry official on the condition of anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

Bangladesh can take up to \$7 billion from the IMF as per its special drawing rights allocation, but the government would be seeking \$4.5 billion.

The \$987 million loan taken in 2012 under the three-year Extended Credit Facility programme is the largest amount taken from the Washington-based multilateral lender as of now.

Loans from the IMF typically come with tough reform plans, which often end up being too exacting to implement for many countries.

Noab hikes newspaper price by Tk 2 from Jul 25

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

All newspapers owned by the members of Newspaper Owners' Association of Bangladesh (Noab) will see a price increase of at least Tk 2 per issue from July 25.

This was announced in a statement issued by Noab yesterday. It means newspapers which now sell for Tk 10 a copy will be sold for Tk 12 and those priced at Tk 5 will be sold for Tk 7.

"The newspaper industry all over the world had been going through different crises. The revenue from both advertisement and circulation had been dropping. This crisis further deepened due to the pandemic in 2020. Despite all these, we did not increase the prices of newspapers," said the statement.

"The cost of our publication has increased hugely. The price of newsprint, our primary raw material, went up in

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CU SEXUAL ASSAULT Fingers pointed at BCL men Students allege negligence of CU admin

FM MIZANUR RAHAMAN and NAIMUR RAHMAN, Ctg

Those who sexually assaulted a female student on Chittagong University campus on July 17 night are members of Bangladesh Chhatra League, said police sources and CU BCL insiders.

An officer of Hathazari Police Station, preferring anonymity, told The Daily Star, "From witnesses and substantial evidence, we have gathered that the accused are Chhatra League activists. But their faces could not be identified from the CCTV footage."

According to the CU Proctor Office, the university has around 135 CCTV cameras. However, only half of those have night vision.

Ruhul Amin, officer-in-charge of Hathazari Model Police Station, said, "We are working to arrest those involved in the incident. However, their identities could not be confirmed, as CCTV footage is not clear and of poor quality. But my teams are working and we are hoping to get results soon."

He, however, declined to comment on the involvement of BCL men until the investigation is complete. Meanwhile, teachers and students of the university alleged the CU administration has been negligent in involving the law enforcers.

Following the incident, former leaders of CU BCL, on their Facebook profiles, criticised the roles of the current Chhatra League leaders and demanded exemplary punishment to the abusers.

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YET-TO-START MEGA PROJECTS

Consider putting them on hold

Debapriya Bhattacharya urges govt

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Given the current economic situation, the government should consider suspending mega projects the physical work of which has yet to begin, economist Debapriya Bhattacharya said yesterday.

Unless these projects are of utmost importance, they should be put on hold, he said.

"Bangladesh needs to be wary of the debt situation as well, since it may become somewhat tricky in 2024-26 as the repayment schedule for many of the high value loans will kick off around that time," he said at a virtual dialogue titled Top 20 Mega Projects in Bangladesh: Trends and Status.

"There is a need for defining a repayment strategy, including rescheduling of imminent payments, given the current account and foreign reserve status."

"Very close monitoring will be paramount to keep the debt situation in check." Debapriya also said the government should review several projects in which there was "visible corruption".

The comments come at a time when the country is struggling with dwindling foreign currency reserves, runaway inflation, and energy crisis.

Debapriya and his team researched on 20 most expensive mega projects, including the Padma Bridge, Padma Bridge Rail Link, Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant, and three metro rail projects.

The total implementation cost of the 20 projects is Tk 556,955.74 crore, of which 61.17 percent is supposed to be foreign assistance.

Foreign sources are supposed to finance over 50 percent of 14 of the 20 projects.

There are 11 transportation and communication sector projects and four electricity and fuel sector projects.

The projects related to electricity and fuel are much larger and more foreign-finance dependent, he said.

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BANGLADESH'S ASSOCIATION WITH IMF

- ➔ Member since Aug 17, 1972
- ➔ First took loan in 1974
- ➔ 12 loans since membership
- ➔ Last loan taken out in 2012 (\$987m)
- ➔ Received \$732m in 2020 to fight Covid

The conditions that Bangladesh would be subjected to can be gauged from the mission's concluding statement.

According to documents seen by The Daily Star, implementing a fuel pricing mechanism, removing the interest rate caps on lending and borrowing, resetting the methodology to report on foreign currency reserves, increasing revenue base, and strengthening corporate governance in the banking sector top the recommendations made by the mission.

"Elevated global commodity prices, growth slowdown in major trading partners and normalisation of remittance inflows suggest that the balance of payments will be under pressure in the coming years, with net reserves declining further," the mission said.

As of July 13, Bangladesh's foreign currency reserves stood at \$39.8 billion, enough to cover just about five months' import bills. In times of economic uncertainty, an import cover of 8-9 months is prescribed by multilateral lenders.

The IMF is in disagreement with the Bangladesh Bank's method of calculating foreign exchange reserves, which include the riskier local investment exposure.

"Going forward, the current account balance and the exchange rate will be assessed using the External Balance Assessment methodology," it said, adding that an outreach mission will be planned.

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'You cannot remain silent'

HC tells railway officials about passengers on train roofs, ticket scalping

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The High Court yesterday came down hard on Bangladesh Railway for mismanagement, ticket scalping and carrying passengers on the train roofs.

"If any train carries passengers on its roof, appropriate actions will be taken against the officials concerned," said the court.

The bench of Justice Md Nazrul Islam Talukder and Justice Khizir Hayat made the remarks during a suo moto proceedings on this issue.

The HC bench ordered the rail authorities to inform it by July 31 what steps have been taken to stop passengers journeying on the train roofs and ticket scalping – a practice of illegally purchasing tickets for reselling them at an inflated price.

During the proceedings, the HC asked two railway officials, "Why is there so much mismanagement in rail services? Why will ticket scalping take place? Why will people travel on the roof of the trains?"

Such a situation cannot be allowed to continue, the bench observed.

Earlier on the day, Joint Director General of Bangladesh Railway AM Salahuddin and Director (Traffic) Md Nahid Hasan Khan and sohoz.com official Zunayer Hossain appeared before the HC bench to convey the steps taken to prevent mismanagement in the railway services.

AM Salahuddin told the HC bench they have some

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At least 69 shops go up in flames at Durchari Bazar of Baghaichari upazila in Rangamati yesterday. Five people were injured trying to douse the fire that is believed to have originated from a stove.

PHOTO: COLLECTED

Murmu elected India's 15th president



AFP, New Delhi

Droupadi Murmu was elected India's 15th president yesterday with the backing of the ruling party, making her the first person from a marginalised community to occupy the top post.

Murmu, who is from the Santhal tribe, secured the largely ceremonial position with the support of more than half the electorate of MPs and state legislators, partial results released by the election commission showed.

Murmu, 64, was nominated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist

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