



2 truckloads of illegal liquor seized



Ushering in a wind of change



Indian chief justice slams 'kangaroo courts'



Is our ailment communalism or intolerance?

POWER SECTOR EXTERNAL DEBT

Repayment may pose a challenge

Tk 197, 677.27cr will have to be paid in 30 years from 2024

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE, ZYMA ISLAM and RASHIDUL HASAN

The repayment of foreign loans in the power sector may worsen the country's debt-servicing burden as the government will have to pay the lenders Tk 197,677.27 crore in the 30 years from 2024-25 fiscal.

The loans, taken out for the construction of 27 power plants and a network expansion project, are equivalent to 4.44 percent of the country's current GDP.

The Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant alone has a debt of Tk 90,474 crore.

For the 26 other plants, Tk 94,174.79 crore will have to be repaid, according to the Power Division data submitted last week to the parliamentary standing committee on power, energy and mineral resources ministry.

The Dhaka Power Distribution Company's network strengthening initiative has a debt of over Tk 13,000 crore.

Foreign loans account for three-quarters of the costs of the 26 public power plants.

The data submitted to the parliamentary body was signed by a deputy secretary of the Power Division on July 17.

According to the documents, the government has repaid about 16 percent of the total amount.

Economist Debapriya Bhattacharya has repeatedly warned about the intense pressure that such debts would place on the economy.

"We are at a point when we are seeking budgetary assistance from the World Bank and International Monetary Fund. We have to ensure that we do not have to borrow to repay loans. We have neither the revenue surplus, nor the forex reserve needed," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

"Will we have enough foreign exchange to do the debt servicing? We need to have a repayment plan," he said.

He added that the power plant projects should be implemented as per schedule so as to guarantee economic returns on the investment.

Addressing an event on Thursday, he said the country should be cautious about the debt situation, because the repayment of multiple large loans taken for mega projects will begin between 2024 and 2026.

"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 in keeping the debt

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Debapriya Bhattacharya



An electric rickshaw getting recharged at a garage in Ashkona area of the capital yesterday. The battery-powered rickshaws, banned by the High Court in 2014, are still quite common on the outskirts of the city and they consume power from the grid.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

Fitness farce

Killer truck gets fitness certificate without inspection while in impound; BRTA official suspended

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The onion-laden truck that mowed down three people in Mymensingh's Trishal upazila on July 16 – including an eight-month pregnant woman who gave birth on the spot – got its fitness certificate while impounded at a police station two days later.

The vehicle got the clearance without any inspection, which violates section 20 of the Road Transport Act-2018 and relevant orders.

A dying woman giving birth at the scene of an accident created sensation across the country.

Police seized the truck on July 16 and arrested the driver, who had fled the scene, on July 19. The driver had no valid licence and the vehicle had no fitness clearance or tax token, law enforcers had said then.

It is mandatory to inspect the vehicle before issuing a fitness certificate, which inspector Nur Mohammad Toha of Narayanganj circle disregarded while certifying the truck bearing the number plate Dhaka Metro-Ta-20-3580.

"The matter was revealed in an internal investigation following media coverage on the accident," said an official of the Bangladesh Road Transport Authority on the condition of anonymity.

But this is not a standalone incident, according to BRTA officials.

And the lapse in the process came to the fore at a time when questions are being raised about the quality of the BRTA inspection itself --



which is generally carried out manually – before giving the fitness clearance.

Unfit vehicles are considered a major reason behind road accidents, which saw a sharp rise in recent years and have become a serious cause for concern.

In 2021, 5,088 people were killed in 5,472 road crashes, up 29.86 percent and 30.34 percent respectively from a year earlier, according to the police.

Some brokers in collusion with a section of unscrupulous BRTA officials manage fitness clearance without even getting the vehicles to the BRTA offices concerned.

The Daily Star spoke with two people who get fitness certificates for their vehicles renewed with the service of brokers and without paying a visit to the BRTA office.

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Floods over, not the struggles

Having lost homes and crops, Sunamganj villagers suffer

PINAKI ROY

It has been around a month since flood waters began receding across Sylhet division.

However, people there are still suffering.

"My house was just there..." Rowshan Ara Begum pointed towards what is now all river waters.

Her homestead, on an embankment by the Khasiamara river, was washed away due to flash floods and erosion on June 17.

Rowshan, aged around 50, along with many homeless villagers of Zirgaon, rushed to the riverbank upon hearing that people from Dhaka were on their way to the village with help.

Zirgaon is located at the foot of the Khasi hill, near the river, in Laxmipur union of Sunamganj's Dowarabazar upazila.

"Now, there is no sign that a house once stood there," she said.

Describing the night she lost her home, she said, "I was awakened around 1:00am by my neighbour who was trying to alert me to an onrush of flood water.

"I rushed out of the house with my youngest son – eight-year-old Zaber. But the current was so strong that we were pushed into a lemon bush and then a bamboo grove."

The water increased so fast that it began flowing at neck level within minutes. Rowshan, with her son in one arm, used the other to grab onto a bamboo stick.

They had to wait there like that for a few hours.

"Two neighbours carrying torches noticed and rescued us. I don't even know how much time had passed by then."

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BUSINESS

BB moves to cut banks' default loans

Bangladesh Bank plans to sign a memorandum of understanding with 10 commercial banks for taking various steps on a pilot basis, including periodically publishing their lists of defaulters, in a bid to reduce their defaulted loans.

The BB recently shared this plan with a visiting mission of International Monetary Fund.

STORY ON B1



A few huts still stand on stilts while many others like these have recently been washed away by the Shyala river in Joymoni area of Mongla, Bagerhat, during high tide. Many poor families in the area have been rendered homeless by what locals say is an unusually aggressive nature of the river.

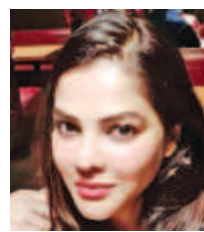
PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

'RECRUITMENT SCAM'

West Bengal minister, aide arrested



Partha Chatterjee



Arpita Mukherjee

OUR CORRESPONDENT, New Delhi

West Bengal Commerce and Industry Minister Partha Chatterjee, a trusted aide of Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee, was arrested yesterday in connection with an alleged scam relating to the recruitment of teachers in government schools.

Chatterjee was produced before Bankshall Court in central Kolkata's Dalhousie Square and he was placed on two-day remand of the Enforcement Directorate (ED).

The ED, which deals with money laundering cases, also arrested Chatterjee's close aide Arpita Mukherjee, an actress who appeared in a few Bangla and Odiya films. Rs 21.20 crore in cash was seized on Friday from her flat, an ED official said.

Apart from the cash stuffed in several bags, the ED also

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