



P4 Transforming into a ghost town



P7 Millions battle Pakistan floods as deaths rise



P11 'Most dominant week of my career'



B1 Private sector credit growth rises in July

'Greater unity' prime focus

Say BNP leaders; Jamaat remains an ally as 20-party inactive but not dissolved

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA



Instead of making the 20-party alliance functional, the BNP plans to forge a "greater unity" among the opposition forces to realise the demand for the next national election under a non-partisan administration.

Insiders say the BNP has adopted a strategy not to make the 20-party combine effective, keeping in mind the local and international reservations about the Jamaat-e-Islami, a key component of the alliance.

But the controversial Islamist party officially remains an ally as the BNP high-ups have not yet decided to sever the ties.

BNP sources said the decision to make the alliance dysfunctional was taken at a meeting with Jamaat in August last year and both the parties agreed to keep it a secret.

The issue came to the fore following Jamaat Ameer Shafiqur Rahman's statement that the BNP does not

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A worker at an aluminium cookware factory passes idle time during a power outage in Chattogram city's Muradpur yesterday. Factory owners say labour costs have gone up due to wasted working hours, about three to four hours every day. The price of their products has risen to Tk 390 a kg from Tk 360, thanks to the rise in prices of raw materials and increased labour costs.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAHMAN

Fuel prices cut by Tk 5 per litre

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday trimmed fuel prices by Tk 5 per litre in line with the 11.25 percentage point slash in the import duty of diesel by the National Board of Revenue.

From today, the retail price of diesel and kerosene would be Tk 109, petrol Tk 125 and octane Tk 130.

The price adjustment of 3.7 to 4.39 percent comes 23 days after the government went for a record fuel price hike of 42.5 to 42.7 percent.

Adjustment of such a small margin drew criticism from ordinary people.

This will not affect the prices of any of the products that were raised in line with the record hike earlier this month, said Shamsul Alam, vice-president of the Consumers' Association of Bangladesh.

For instance, bus fare was increased 22 percent on long routes and 16.3 percent for city routes. Launch fare was hiked 30 percent.

"With the decision, the government has created the ground for illicit profit-

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INTERNATIONAL DAY OF THE VICTIMS OF ENFORCED DISAPPEARANCES

Where do they disappear to?

ZYMA ISLAM

"How are our loved ones? Are they eating well? Are they being tortured? Are they... alive?"

These questions haunt the family members of the victims of enforced disappearance as they spend agonising weeks, months and years, holding out hope against all odds.

At least 522 people have become victims of enforced disappearance between 2009 and 2018 in Bangladesh, according to various human rights organisations.

Most survivors who come back home after being released from their forced captivity stay away from the public eye, never revealing where they were or who took them. A March 2022 study by the Centre for Governance Studies (CGS) tracked down cases happening between 2019 and 2021

and found that of the 30 percent of victims that were released, or officially arrested and thrown in jail, not one spoke up.

But on condition of anonymity, five such survivors answered the questions asked most pertinently by their loved ones.

Even though their families had searched every alleyway, the survivors claimed that they were right around the corner in the capital. All testimonies by survivors point to at least two separate centres in Dhaka city, allegedly run by a security force and a law enforcement agency, and a third centre in a southern district.

According to the claims made in the interviews, the centres are fully fledged illegal prisons, running on taxpayers' money meant for maintaining law and order and protecting the country.

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IMPORT DUTY CUT

Truckloads of rice enter via land ports

STAR REPORT

Truckloads of rice from India started crossing into Bangladesh through land ports a day after the government slashed import duty on the staple.

On Sunday, the government cut regulatory duty on rice imports to 15.25 percent from upwards of 25 percent.

Although the government in June permitted around 13 lakh tonnes of rice import, the importers held back fearing huge losses due to the soaring value to the dollar against the taka and were waiting for the government to reduce the tax on imports.

After the duty cut, 230 trucks laden with rice were offloaded in Benapole, Jashore while 20 truckloads of rice were offloaded in Dinajpur's Hili port yesterday, said officials.

Motiar Rahman, director of India-Bangladesh Chamber of Commerce, told The Daily Star that the fall in duty is expected to lower the price of the staple as fresh consignments start entering the market.

"We started offloading rice from today [Monday]. Hopefully, the market will ease from now on," he said.

Al Mamun, a rice importer in Benapole, said customs officials were clearing coarse rice at \$380 per tonne

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Universal pension bill placed in JS

Citizens aged 18-50yrs can avail scheme; rules to be finalised after scrutiny

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A bill was placed in the Jatiya Sangsad yesterday, aiming to include citizens aged between 18 and 50 in a pension scheme.

The Universal Pension Management Bill, 2022, was sent to the relevant parliamentary committee for scrutiny after Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal placed it in the House.

The committee was asked to submit a report within two months. Jatiya Party lawmaker Fakhru Islam opposed the bill, saying the proposed law is aimed at doing business.

In response, the finance minister said the members of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Finance Ministry would hold discussions on the bill during scrutiny.

"I promise you that the bill will be finalised after taking into account opinions of the lawmakers," added Kamal.

The Finance Division prepared the draft of the bill, which seeks to provide financial security to the growing elderly population in case of unemployment, disease, paralysis or penury.

According to the bill, expatriate Bangladeshis can also avail themselves of the benefit. They can get registered under the scheme. The inclusion in this pension scheme will be voluntary unless the government issues a gazette for making it compulsory.

A person will have to pay premiums for at least 10 years to get pension from the age of 60 until death. The amount of premium will be determined by a rule under the proposed law.

If an elderly person dies before the age of 75, the nominee will get the pension for the remaining period.

There will be a five-member national pension authority, headed by a chairman. The government will appoint the chairman and the other four members.

As per the bill, there will also be a 15-member governing body with the finance minister as its chair. It will include, among others, the Bangladesh Bank governor, the finance secretary, the National Board

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Tigers face Afghan challenge

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh will begin their Asia Cup campaign from Group B when they take on the high-flying Afghanistan team at the Sharjah International Cricket Stadium today. The match is scheduled to begin at 8 pm [BST].



It will be a tough challenge for Shakib Al Hasan and his troops to progress into the top four from their group, where Afghanistan started off in a confident fashion, having beaten Sri Lanka by eight wickets in the tournament opener on Saturday.

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Don't miss today's CONSUMER ELECTRONICS SUPPLEMENT

DGHS closes 92 healthcare facilities

STAR REPORT

Health officials yesterday shut down 92 illegal private healthcare facilities across the country.

Of those, eight were in Dhaka, 23 in Chattogram, 34 in Mymensingh, 10 each in Rajshahi, Khulna and seven in Rangpur, Dewan Md Mehedi Hasan, medical officer (hospitals and clinics) at the Directorate General of Health Services, told The Daily Star.

"The drive will continue until Thursday," Sheikh Daud Adnan, deputy director (hospitals and clinics) at the DGHS, told this newspaper yesterday.

Around noon, six teams from the health directorate started the drive in their designated areas in the capital.

At Hair Transplant and Cosmetic Surgery Centre in

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DGHS officials check lights at the operating theatre of a clinic in the capital's Chankharpul during a drive against unregistered hospitals and clinics yesterday. The health directorate found irregularities at the clinic near Dhaka Medical College Hospital and ordered its authorities to shut it down.

PHOTO: ANISUR RAHMAN

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