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## Now 100 roads set to open

PM to inaugurate them on Dec 21 after last month's 100 bridges

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

After opening 100 new bridges to traffic in a single day last month, the government is now going to, simultaneously inaugurate 100 roads, most of which were either widened or renovated recently.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will virtually inaugurate the roads with a combined length of over 2,000 kilometres in 51 districts on December 21, officials said.

The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) has spent around Tk 15,000 crores in the last few years on these roads, they added.

Of the roads waiting for inauguration, only works on the 70km stretch from Gazipur's Joydebpur to Tangail's Alenga was done with foreign loans. Under this project, the road was widened to four lanes with service lanes on both sides.

The rest of the work was done with government funds, they said.

"We had the target to open 100 bridges simultaneously. We achieved that. Now our target is to open 100 roads. It will be achieved on December 21," RHD Chief Engineer AKM Manir Hossain Pathan told The Daily Star yesterday.

He said opening the 100 roads to traffic would further improve the connectivity in the districts.

The new roads also include regional or national highways, he said, adding that most of the physical work on these roads were done in the last three years, he said.

Prior to the development work, many roads were only

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Leaders and activists of the BNP demonstrate in front of their party office at Nayapaltan protesting the police attacks on the office premises and arrests of the party men. They stayed there for around two hours. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## BNP defers its programme on AL request

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Responding to the ruling Awami League's request not to organise processions in the capital on December 24, the BNP last night decided to reschedule its programme.

The decision was made at a meeting of the BNP Standing Committee hours after AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader told the opposition party that the AL's national council would be on December 24 and requested that no processions be organised in the capital on that day.

AL leaders and activists will come to the city from across the country for the council, Quader told BNP leaders.

The BNP on December 10 announced that it would hold processions countrywide on December 24.

Contacted, BNP Standing Committee member Goyeshwar Chandra Roy said, "We were not aware of the Awami

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## RETAIL POWER PRICE HIKE Govt to decide on proposal if BERC delays

UNB, Dhaka

If the Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) delays deciding on retail power price hike proposals, the Power Division will make its call, said State Minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Nasrul Hamid.

He made the remarks while talking to reporters at the sideline of a stakeholders meeting on the "Integrated Energy and Power Master Plan (IEPMP)", organised by the Japan International Cooperation Agency, at a city hotel yesterday.

Outgoing Japanese Ambassador Ito Naoki also addressed the event.

Responding to a question on the role of energy regulator after the amendment to the BERC Act 2003 which gives the government arbitrary authority to increase the prices of power and energy bypassing the public hearing process, the state minister said if the BERC takes so much of times in deciding on price adjustment issue, then the government will decide on its own.

He said normally BERC will follow its own process to decide on the price adjustment. "But only in an emergency situation, the government will take the decision."

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## BNP plotted to create anarchy, oust govt

Says foreign ministry in letter to diplomatic missions

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The foreign ministry has told all diplomatic missions in Dhaka that the BNP planned to take control of the streets forcefully through its grand rally on December 10 and invite a vested quarter to power by creating anarchy.

In a letter sent to the missions on December 12, it said BNP leaders Mirza Fakhrul Islam Alamgir and Mirza Abbas were arrested as they were involved in planning deliberate violence and chaos by instigating party workers to attack law enforcement agencies.

Earlier on December 7, 15 foreign missions in Dhaka issued a joint statement reaffirming the importance of a free, fair, inclusive and peaceful electoral process in Bangladesh.

Also, the White House on December 10 called on the Bangladesh government to fully investigate reports of violence against journalists and human rights activists ahead of the rally and urged all parties to refrain from violence.

In the letter, the ministry said the BNP leaders announced bringing about 2.5 million people to Dhaka from all over the country for the grand rally.

Assessing the possible implications on security, public safety, the safety of properties, public mobility and overall law and order in the capital ahead of Victory Day, Dhaka Metropolitan Police (DMP) offered the BNP

historic Suhrawardy Udyan as the venue for its public meeting.

The BNP, however, turned down the offer, arguing it would not have enough time to prepare the venue as Bangladesh Chhatra League (BCL) was scheduled to hold its national council on December 8 there.

According to the letter, the ruling party decided to bring forward the BCL's council to December 6 to give the BNP enough time to prepare the venue.

BNP leaders, however, insisted on holding the meeting on the busy road in front of its Nayapaltan party office without showing any good reason, the letter said.

Nayapaltan is one of the busiest areas in Dhaka, where even a small gathering in the area seriously reduces public mobility and leads to gridlock in the entire city.

Thus, holding a large political meeting there would risk public safety and security and security of properties.

"In assessing the situation, police also took into account the unprovoked vandalism by BNP activists during their unauthorised gathering in Nayapaltan on December 7 that resulted in severe injuries of police personnel and the death of a passer-by."

The DMP was then working even on alternative venues. Senior AL leaders also

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## 'BNP desperate after flop Dec 10 rally'

BSS, Cox's Bazar

Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader yesterday said as the BNP's December 10 rally was a super flop, its leaders have become perplexed and desperate now.

"We scored goals in the quarterfinal, we will score goals in the semifinal, and we will win in the final too. This game is a game of national elections," he said while virtually attending the triennial conference of Cox's Bazar District Awami League, held at Sheikh Kamal International Cricket Stadium.

Quader asked AL leaders to evaluate the sacrifices of those who upheld the spirit of the party during its difficult times.

He said the country's people know about AL leaders and what they do, but they (people) do not say anything as the leaders are in power, asking the AL grassroots leaders to remain alert so that none carry out misdeeds using the party's name.

## 'Complete' Roman-era cemetery found in Gaza

AFP, Gaza City



Researchers in the northern Gaza Strip have unearthed dozens of Roman-era tombs at a site discovered earlier this year during construction work, the Palestinian enclave's Islamist rulers Hamas announced Monday.

Construction workers had uncovered 31 tombs near the town of Beit Lahia as work began in early 2022 on an Egyptian-funded residential project, part of reconstruction efforts after the 11-day war in May 2021 between Israel and armed groups in blockaded Gaza.

The project has been partially suspended following the discovery, and a team from the local antiquities ministry visited the site to catalogue the findings and look for more, Fazl al-Atal, head of the excavation team, told AFP on Monday.

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## Jamaat chief remanded CTC accuses him of having militant link

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Counter Terrorism and Transnational Crime unit of police arrested Jamaat-e-Islami Ameer Mohammad Shafiqur Rahman for what officers said was his direct link to a militant organisation.

Shafiqur has links to a newly formed militant outfit named Jama'atul Ansar Fil Hindal Sharqiya, said CTC chief Md Asaduzzaman at a press conference at the DMP Media Centre yesterday.

Shafiqur's son Rafat Chowdhury, currently in jail, travelled to the hill tracts with 11 others to receive training on arms from Kuki-Chin National Front, he said, adding that Shafiqur paid for the trip.

Rafat and his associates held meetings at Shafiqur's house in Sylhet and conducted "recruitment activities" for the militant outfit.

Officers arrested SEE PAGE 7 COL 1



A teenage girl pouring water into a homemade purifier to filter out harmful substances. Many families, mostly of the low-income group, use such purifiers -- made of sand, stone and other materials -- to get clean drinking water in Sylhet. The photo was taken in the city's Kadamtali Ferryghat area yesterday.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR

## SOS from 250 Rohingyas stuck in Malacca Strait

180 reported missing from the Andaman Sea

PORIMOL PALMA

Two boats carrying around 250 Rohingyas are calling for rescue after getting stranded in the Malacca Strait due to engine failures, while another boat carrying some 180 Rohingyas went missing from the Andaman Sea.

Three boats -- the first carrying 160 Rohingyas, the second 95, and the third 180 -- started from the coast of Cox's Bazar in the last week of November.

In the rough sea, the boat engines got damaged, said Saiful Arakani, a Rohingya journalist, who spoke to the stranded Rohingyas over satellite phone used by the boatmen.

"Due to heavy winds, the boats drifted in the Andaman Sea for some days. They ended up in the Malacca Strait of Indonesia," Saiful Arakani told The Daily Star by phone.

The other boat with 180 Rohingyas, which was also drifting in the Andaman Sea, has been missing for the last few days.

"Several of the Rohingyas have also died and those who are alive have no food. Many have fallen sick. If they are not rescued soon, there is a risk many could die in the sea," Saiful said in an appeal to the regional countries.

Chris Lewa, director of the Arakan Project rights group, which has interviewed the families of those onboard, said the boat was leaking and there is no water or food.

"We have information about where it was. It is lucky this boat has a satphone," she said, adding that despite

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