

Mild cold wave sweeps parts of country

Temperature likely to fall further

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The winter winds are here and some parts of the country yesterday experienced mild cold waves with the lowest temperature of 9.5 degrees Celsius recorded in Chuadanga.

In Dhaka, the mercury dipped to 17.1 degrees Celsius, according to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD).

Temperature is likely to fall further in the last week of December.

Meanwhile, a 9.6 degree Celsius temperature was recorded in Rajshahi, 10.2 degree Celsius in Ishwardi, and 10.5 degree Celsius in Badorgachi.

Md Tariqul Newaz Kabir, meteorologist of BMD said temperature between 8 to 10 degree Celsius is considered a mild cold wave, 6 to 8 degree Celsius is said to be a moderate cold wave and less than 6 degree Celsius is a severe cold wave.

The temperature will fall further in the next few days in areas which are already facing mild cold waves or are

SEE PAGE 7 COL 2



PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN
This is the season for date palm juice -- a tasty winter delicacy and a key ingredient in many rice cakes. So, braving the chilly winter mornings, date palm juice collectors get busy extracting the sweet nectar. The photos were taken recently in Purba Syedpur of Chattogram's Sitakunda upazila.

TRAINING ALLOWANCE CUT EC, Finance Division at odds

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

A difference of opinion has emerged between the Election Commission and the Finance Division after the latter cut the training allowances of EC officials.

The EC, an independent constitutional body, said it will send a letter to the government explaining its position, sources at the commission said.

The EC in June this year sent a letter to the Finance Division detailing its guideline for the module and allowance rate of trainers.

In response, the division, in a recent letter, cancelled the provision of giving training allowances for the election commissioners including the CEC. It also scrapped the training allowances for the EC secretariat secretary and directorate general of the Electoral Training Institute (ETI).

The Finance Division also reduced the training allowances for EC Secretariat's additional secretary, joint secretary and others.

EC officials, however, said the Finance Division does not have the right to cancel or reduce the amount of honorarium fixed by the EC.

Election Commissioner Brigadier General (ret'd) Ahsan Habib Khan said that Section 7 (1) of the Election Commission Secretariat Act, 2009, guarantees the financial independence of the Election Commission.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 4

Trapped in the 'Game Ghor'

300 Bangladeshis held hostage in Libya's Benghazi

MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

Nuruzzaman Raju owned a mobile phone repair shop in the capital's Gulistan.

In the hopes of starting a better life in Europe, the 29-year-old sold his shop for around Tk 12 lakh and left the country for Italy in March this year.

A human trafficking racket first sent him to Dubai and then to Libya.

But his journey came to a sudden stop after Raju reached Libya's Benghazi. There, he has spent the last eight months confined to a place called the "Game Ghor", where migrants are tortured and extorted.

This is how, Raju's father Aminul Islam, narrated the tragic turn of events that transpired with his son.

"I get calls from my son every two-three days. Goons are torturing Raju for ransom. He is crying out for help but I'm helpless," said Aminul.

"They sent me videos of them torturing Raju, asking for Tk 10 lakh," said Aminul.

"When I said I don't have that kind of money, a Bangladeshi identifying himself as Sharif called me and made a deal for Tk 7 lakh," he said.

Aminul said he was able to manage Tk 5.5 lakh after selling his property and taking out a loan. He then deposited the money into two bank accounts and a Mobile Financial Services (MFS) account in November.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1

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BR goes for massive recruitment

7,700 likely to get railway jobs

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

Bangladesh Railway has started its biggest recruitment process in recent time as the state-run rail transport agency is running short of manpower, hampering its services seriously.

BR has got the railways ministry's approval to recruit around 7,700 manpower under 17 categories in the first phase, and 295 people have already joined. The recruitment process for 1,451 others is almost completed, said BR sources.

The process for recruiting manpower to several other posts is now at different stages, with written test for 1,086 posts of khalasi (technical assistant) already done, they said.

The railway authorities are recruiting the non-gazetted staffers of grade 13 to 20 -- the major workforce for railway operation -- as per the new recruitment rules approved in November 2020, they added.

The move to increase manpower comes after around five years of suspension of the recruitment process in the absence of recruitment rules.

Currently, BR is running with 50



"We are trying to complete the recruitment within the quickest possible time as around 24,000 posts remain vacant."

BR Director General Quamrul Ahsan

percent of its approved manpower of 47,637.

Operation of more than 100 stations and 99 trains, mostly locals, cannot resume mainly due to manpower shortage, said officials.

The BR has 361 trains in its fleet to operate on its 3,093km network,

but cannot run at least 99 of those mostly for a lack of carriages and manpower, particularly loco-masters and guards.

Moreover, 123 stations remain closed for shortages of station masters and their associates, according to a BR document placed at a workshop in June this year.

"We are trying to complete the recruitment within the quickest possible time as around 24,000 posts remain vacant," BR Director General Quamrul Ahsan told The Daily Star yesterday.

This is the biggest recruitment in railway in recent time, he said, adding that they would try to fill most of the vacant posts within next year.

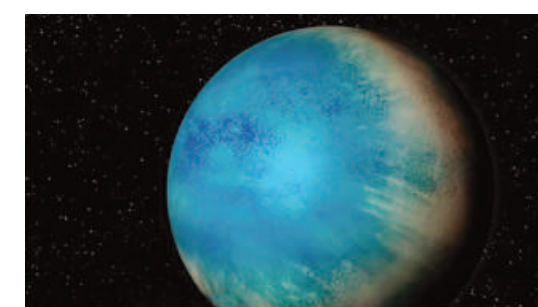
According to a recent BR document, 23,178, out of 47,637 posts, remain unoccupied.

BR officials said they recruited around 13,000 staffers between 2010 and 2017, but none of the recruitment was as big as the current one.

The lack of manpower not only forced the authorities to close stations and operate trains, but also delays maintenance and rescue operation after any rail accidents,

SEE PAGE 7 COL 3

Scientists find new 'water worlds'



INDEPENDENT.CO.UK

Scientists have found two "water worlds" that are unlike anything seen in our solar system.

The planets are almost entirely made up largely of water, marking the first time that such worlds have ever been confidently identified by scientists.

"We previously thought that planets that were a bit larger than Earth were big balls of metal and rock, like scaled-up versions of Earth, and that's why we called them super-Earths," said Björn Benneke, one of the scientists on the new research and professor of astrophysics at the University of Montreal.

"However, we have now shown that these two planets, Kepler-138c and d, are quite different in nature: a big fraction of their entire volume is likely composed of water. It is the first time we observe planets that can be confidently identified as water worlds, a type of planet that was theorized by astronomers to exist for a long time."

Scientists have not directly detected the water, and that remains difficult at such a long distance. But investigation showed that up to half of the planet should be made up of something lighter than rock and heavier than hydrogen -- and the most likely candidate for that material is water.

IEA REPORT Global coal use set to hit all-time high this year

REUTERS, London

Global coal consumption is set to rise to an all-time high this year and remain at similar levels in the next few years if stronger efforts are not made to move to a low-carbon economy, a report by the International Energy Agency (IEA) said yesterday.

High gas prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and consequent disruptions to supply have led some countries to turn to relatively cheaper coal this year.

Heatwaves and droughts in some regions have also driven up electricity demand and reduced hydropower, while nuclear generation has also been very weak, especially in Europe, where France had to shut down nuclear reactors for maintenance.

The IEA's annual report on coal forecasts global coal use is set to rise by 1.2 percent this year, exceeding 8 billion tonnes in a single year for the first time and a previous record set in 2013.

It also predicts that coal consumption will remain flat at that level to 2025 as falls in mature markets are offset by continued strong demand in emerging Asian economies.

This means coal will continue to be the global energy system's largest single source of carbon dioxide emissions by far.

The largest increase in coal demand is expected to be in India at 7 percent, followed by the European Union at 6 percent and China at 0.4 percent. "The world is close to a peak in fossil fuel use, with coal set to be the first to decline, but we are not there yet," said Keisuke Sadamori, the IEA's director of energy markets and security.



Motorcycles, confiscated by the law enforcers on different charges, left to decay on the premises of DB office in the capital. Apparently, no step is being taken to utilise these assets. The photo was taken recently.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

REPORTS ON MUSK Twitter suspends accounts of journos

AFP, San Francisco

Twitter on Thursday suspended accounts of more than a half-dozen journalists who had been writing about the company and its new owner Elon Musk.

Silencing journalists at Twitter while claiming to be a free speech champion is the latest controversy provoked by Musk since he took over the company, which has seen staffing gutted and advertisers exit.

Some of the journalists had been tweeting about Twitter shutting down an @ElonJet account that tracked flights of billionaire Musk's private jet and about versions of that account hosted at other social networks.

Twitter did not say why the reporters' accounts were suspended.

"Nothing says free speech like suspending

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1