

ILLEGAL HOARDING 2,000 tonnes of paddy seized from rice mill

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Bogura*

The authorities seized over 2,000 tonnes of paddy from an under-construction rice mill in Bogura Sadar upazila for hoarding it illegally. The paddy was seized last night from an auto rice mill of Tanveer Food Ltd in Manikchak area. A team from the District Controller of Food office conducted the raid after receiving information that paddy was being stored in the mill without proper documents. ABM Kibria, food inspector of Bogura Sadar upazila, said around 650 tonnes of paddy were seized from 34 trucks parked on the rice mill's premises, and another 1,400 tonnes were seized from its warehouse. The mill authorities neither had a permit for running the mill nor a storage licence from the food grain department, the official said.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 4

Facebook agrees to pay \$725m to settle privacy suit

AFP, SAN FRANCISCO

Facebook parent Meta has agreed to pay \$725 million to settle a long-running lawsuit that accused the social network of allowing third parties, including Cambridge Analytica, to access users' private data. The amount was disclosed in a court filing late on Thursday. "The proposed settlement of \$725,000,000 is the largest recovery ever achieved in a data privacy class action and the most Facebook has ever paid to resolve a private class action," lawyers for the plaintiffs said in the filing. Facebook has not admitted any wrongdoing as part of the settlement, which must still be approved by a judge in the San Francisco division in the US District Court. It was reported in August that Facebook had reached a preliminary agreement, although the amount and terms of the settlement were not then announced. The lawsuit was initiated in 2018, when Facebook users accused the social network of violating privacy rules by sharing their data with third parties that included the British firm Cambridge Analytica, which had

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6



Security has been beefed up in and around the capital's Suhrawardy Udyan ahead of the ruling Awami League's 22nd National Council today. As part of the measures, police personnel have been deployed at an entrance to the venue. Party leaders from across the country will join the triennial council. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

COVID INFECTIONS

China's stretched health system braces for peak

Authorities take over medical supplies production as
millions struggle to obtain basic drugs, test kits

AGENCIES

China is expecting a peak in Covid-19 infections within a week, a health official said, with authorities predicting extra strain on the country's health system even as they downplay the disease's severity and continue to report no new deaths. In the face of a surging outbreak and widespread protests against its "zero-Covid" regime of lockdowns and testing, China began dismantling it this month, becoming the last major country to move towards living with the virus. Its containment measures had slowed the economy to its slowest growth rate in nearly half a century, jamming global supply chains and trade. As Chinese workers increasingly fall ill, more disruption is expected in the short term before the economy bounces back later next year. China reported less than 4,000 new symptomatic local Covid cases nationwide for December 22, and no new Covid deaths

for a third consecutive day. Authorities have narrowed the criteria for Covid deaths, prompting criticism from many disease experts. Zhang Wenhong, director of the National Centre for Infectious Diseases, was quoted in Shanghai government-backed news outlet The Paper on Thursday as saying China "is expected to reach the peak of infections within a week." "The peak infection will also increase the rate of severe disease, which will have a certain impact on our entire medical resources," he said, adding the wave will last another one or two months after that. "We must be mentally prepared that infection is inevitable." Nevertheless, Zhang said he had visited nursing homes around Shanghai, noticing the number of elderly dealing with severe symptoms was low. The authorities have requisitioned medical supplies production across the country as millions struggle to obtain basic drugs and testing kits in the face of a

surge in cases, reports AFP. They have urged those with mild symptoms to stay at home and take treatment into their own hands, leading to a run on everything from ibuprofen to rapid antigen tests. Nearly 37 million people in China may have been infected with Covid-19 on a single day this week, Bloomberg News reported yesterday, citing estimates from the government's top health authority. Worries over the near-term impact of China's Covid wave pushed stock markets in China .SSEC, Hong Kong .HSI and elsewhere in Asia lower. Infections in China are likely to be more than a million a day with deaths at more than 5,000 a day, a "stark contrast" from official data, British-based health data firm Airfinity said this week. A Shanghai hospital has estimated half of the commercial hub's 25 million people would get infected by the end of next week. Experts say China could face more than a million Covid deaths next year.

Schoolboy found dead in Rajbari

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Rajdipur*

Police recovered the body of a schoolboy in Rajbari's Pangsha upazila yesterday. Rabbi Mandal, 14, of Mohisghanga area, was a student of grade VII at a local school, said his neighbours. He went out with his friends, Tarun and Rana, to attend a waz mahfil around 8:00pm on Thursday, said Korban Ali, member of Mourat Union Parishad. He did not return home at night. Later, locals found his body in a field yesterday morning, he added. On information, police went to the spot and recovered the body, said Sumon Saha, additional superintendent of Rajbari police (Pangsah circle). "The body was sent to Rajbari General Hospital morgue for autopsy. We are investigating his death to find out the reason behind it," he added.

Woman drowns in the Padma, husband missing

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, *Rajshahi*

A woman drowned while bathing in the Padma and her husband went missing trying to save her yesterday. Manjuri Khatun Nishi, 32, and her husband Salauddin Kader, 38, were on vacation at their home in Rajshahi's Godagari upazila. During the vacation, they went on a picnic at the riverbank in Chapainawabganj Sadar yesterday. While bathing in the river, Nishi started drowning. At one point, locals rescued and rushed her to Rajshahi Medical College Hospital where declared her dead, said Kamrul Islam, officer-in-charge of Godagari Police Station. Her husband, a banker by profession, went missing in the river while trying to save her, the police official added. An unnatural death case was filed with Chapainawabganj Sadar Police Station in this connection. Divers of Rajshahi and Chapainawabganj were looking for Kader in the river till the evening.

Thai PM declares candidacy in next year's election

AFP, *Bangkok*

Thai Prime Minister Prayut Chan O-Cha is to seek another term in a general election due to be held in the kingdom before May next year, he told local media yesterday. Prayut came to power as army chief in a 2014 coup before cementing his position in a controversial 2019 election, but his popularity has been in the doldrums. The newly-created United Thai Nation Party "has offered to support me in becoming the next PM candidate in the next election," he told reporters outside Government House in Bangkok. "I will make it clear today... that I have decided that I will join the role." Prayut had been widely expected to leave his Palang Pracharath Party (PPRP), which leads the ruling coalition.

Russia wants end to war

FROM PAGE 1
to settling the conflict and Moscow would find a way to counter it. These comments drew quick US scepticism. White House spokesman John Kirby said Putin had "shown absolutely zero indication that he's willing to negotiate" an end to the war. "Everything he (Putin) is doing on the ground and in the air bespeaks a man who wants to continue to visit violence upon the Ukrainian people (and) escalate the war," Kirby told reporters. Russia has repeatedly said it is open to negotiations, but Ukraine and its allies suspect a ploy to buy time after a series of Russian battlefield defeats and retreats that have swung the momentum of the 10-month war in favour of Ukraine. Meanwhile, Zelensky returned home from his first wartime foreign

trip buoyed by the support shown by President Joe Biden. "We are coming back from Washington with good results. With something that will really help," Zelensky said on Telegram. US lawmakers were expected to approve a \$45 billion aid package for Ukraine later yesterday. But Zelensky's visit leaves many questions unanswered, including how US military aid could evolve, whether US Congressional support will endure, and how the war will end. US officials say a single Patriot battery will not change the course of the war, reports Reuters. Putin has previously said that sanctions against Russia will not make it change its position on Ukraine and Western arms supplies will only drag out the conflict. Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak told state television yesterday

that Russia may cut oil output by 5-7 percent in early 2023 as it responds to price caps on its crude and oil products by halting sales to the countries that support them. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said deployment of the Patriot system in Ukraine was not conducive to a settlement. "And this cannot prevent the Russian Federation from achieving its goals during the special military operation", he said. The White House said on Thursday that a private Russian military company, the Wagner Group, took delivery last month of infantry rockets and missiles from North Korea to help bolster Russian forces in Ukraine. Britain said it reached the same conclusion and condemned the move. But Wagner's head, Yevgeny Prigozhin, dismissed the talk as

"gossip and speculation". North Korea's foreign ministry denied the report, calling it "groundless", the official KCNA news agency reported yesterday. It is the United States that is "bringing bloodshed and destruction to Ukraine by providing it with various kinds of lethal weapons", a ministry spokesperson said in a statement carried by the KCNA. On the battlefield, the General Staff of the Ukrainian Armed Forces said on Facebook on Thursday that fighting in the eastern Donetsk region remained focused on Bakhmut and nearby Avdiivka. Near Bakhmut, Russian forces shelled about 10 towns, while close to Avdiivka, they pounded the towns of Kostyantivka and Maryinka as well as Vodyane and Nevelske, the Ukrainian military said.

Escape of 2 militants

FROM PAGE 1
alias Samir alias Imran and Abu Siddiq Sohel -- who were sentenced to death for killing publisher Faisal Arefin Dipan, fled the premises of Dhaka Chief Judicial Magistrate's Court on November 20. Later, a case was filed with Kotwali Police Station in this connection. Of the two, Sohel was also sentenced to death for the murder of blogger-writer Avijit Roy. Bangladesh Police has announced a bounty of Tk 10 lakh each on the fugitives.

16 Indian soldiers killed in road accident

AFP, *New Delhi*

Sixteen soldiers were killed in India's remote northeast yesterday when the military truck transporting them skidded down a steep mountain slope and crashed, the army said.

1,000MW solar power

FROM PAGE 1
to produce 40 percent of clean power by 2040 as part of its commitment to reduce the impact of climate change. Bangladesh submitted Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to UNFCCC (United Nation's Framework Convention on Climate Change) promising to produce 911 MW unconditional with its own resources and another 4114 MW conditional renewable power subject to the availability of fund and technical support. If it had been approved on time, the project could have added 200 MW of power by the time the power crisis hit the country. As per the project documents, the facility can be made ready to produce 1,000 MW within two and half years. Eleris is still waiting for a response to a Letter of Interest (LoI) to Bangladesh Power Division since February. Although the company officials held a series of meetings with Power Division high-ups to get the project approved, the project did not see any progress. Jerry Price, chief operating officer of Eleris Energy Global LLC told The Daily Star that the land they were leased out for the project in Swarnadip remains under water eight months a year. "The 1,000MW solar project on Swarnadip will provide inexpensive power with an economic impact coming back to the people of Bangladesh of more than US\$2.42 Billion. This includes over 1,000 construction jobs as well as more than 100 high paying operational jobs that are ongoing", he said. Jerry believed the \$1.79 billion project would make Bangladesh a pioneer in renewable energy. "Despite all these positive economic benefits and positive technical feedback, the project has stalled at the approval stage", Jerry added. As per Power Division information, the power generation capacity rose to 22,348 MW in 2022 from 4,924 MW in 2009. \$25 billion has been spent to build this capacity over the last 13 years. The Power Sector Master Plan drawn in 2010 promised to produce

at least 10 percent of the total power production from renewable energy, a provision excluded in the revised Power Sector Master Plan drawn in 2016. According to the Sustainable and Renewable Energy Development Authority, Bangladesh currently produces a total of 948 MW of which 714 MW comes from solar with 588 MW linked to the national grid. This correspondent tried to reach Nasrul Hamid Bipu, state minister for Power, Energy and Mineral Resources Ministry over phone for his comment on the project. He did not receive phone nor did he reply to the text asking him why this project is still on hold. Nirod Chandra Mondol, joint secretary (renewable energy) of Power Division under Ministry of Power, Energy and Mineral Resources told The Daily Star that they got a proposal from Eleris Energy Global which held several meetings with them. "We have some queries about the project which is in the process", he said. M Zakir Hossain Khan, executive director of Change Initiative, a research platform of renewable energy told The Daily Star that renewable initiatives don't enjoy the flexible provision and facilities fossil fuel based independent power producers enjoy in the country. "If foreign investment in renewable energy unnecessarily delayed, it will send a negative message in the global market. It may affect adaptation funding for us", he said adding that Bangladesh lacks a political decision to shift from fossil fuel to renewables as per its commitment in Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan and Power Sector Master Plan. He commented that the alacrity with which the government acquired land for the Rampal power project, was absent when it came to renewables. Rather, renewable energy faces a setback including a 37 percent VAT and tax on equipment for renewables. Meanwhile, Public Relations Office of the Power Division mentioned that proposals for producing 4,000 MW of solar energy have been waiting for approval for long.

Quader's third term or last-minute drama?

FROM PAGE 1
problem working for the party even if my position is changed in the new committee." He added that he had flaws like everyone else. Several sources said the posts of joint general secretaries and organising secretaries might see new faces. Current joint general secretaries Mahabubul Alam Hanif and Dipu Moni may become presidium members. Organising Secretary Mirza Azam, Publicity and Publication Secretary Abdus Sobhan Golap, Liberation War Affairs Secretary Mrinal Kanti Das, and Cultural Secretary Asim Kumar Ukil are major contenders for the two posts. The number of members of the AL Central Working Committee, the highest decision-making body, will not be increased as Hasina is against the idea of making the 81-member body larger. However, 20 to 25 new

faces, mostly former student leaders and immediate past leaders of the AL's front organisations, might be included in the committee, according to the sources. They also said the ruling party is going to incorporate a new clause in its charter, making it mandatory to form full committees within 45 days of holding councils in districts, sources said. The ruling party also decided to recognise Mohila Sramik League as an associate body, they added. Leaders, activists, supporters and well-wishers of the AL are eagerly waiting to see whether Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's family members -- Sheikh Rehana, Saima Wajed Putul, Sajeeb Wazed Joy and Radwan Mujib Siddiq Bobby -- will be included in the party structure. At a meeting last week, several senior members of the AL National Committee said Bangabandhu's family members should be included in the AL committee. In response,

Hasina said that if any of them wishes so, he or she would be included in the AL apex body. At today's council, Hasina, who has been leading the party since her return from exile in 1981, will be reelected as the AL president for the 10th time. She will inaugurate the council at Suhrawardy Udyan at 10:30am. Around 7,000 councillors and 14,000 delegates will vote to elect the AL office bearers in the session at the auditorium of Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh in the afternoon. A three-member election commission led by AL Advisory Council member Yusuf Hossain Humayun will conduct the election. The AL's strategy for the next general election and declaration will be adopted at the council, and its election manifesto will be prepared in light of the adopted declaration. At the event, Hasina will formally launch the AL's election campaign for the national polls.