

## Canada bans most foreigners from buying homes

AFP, Ottawa

A ban on foreigners buying residential property in Canada took effect on Sunday, aiming to make more homes available to locals facing a housing crunch.

Several exceptions in the act allow individuals such as refugees and permanent residents who are not citizens to buy homes.

In late December, Ottawa also clarified that the ban would apply only to city dwellings and not to recreational properties such as summer cottages.

The temporary two-year measure was proposed by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau during the 2021 election campaign when soaring prices put home ownership beyond the reach of many Canadians.

“The desirability of Canadian homes is attracting profiteers, wealthy corporations, and foreign investors,” his Liberal Party said in its election plank at the time.

“This is leading to a real problem of underused and vacant housing, rampant speculation, and skyrocketing prices. Homes are for people, not investors.”

Following their 2021 election victory, the Liberals quietly introduced the Prohibition on the Purchase of Residential Property by Non-Canadians Act.

Major markets such as Vancouver and Toronto have also introduced taxes on non-residents and empty homes.

Despite a recent heyday, the country’s real estate market has cooled for sellers as mortgage rates followed the Bank of Canada’s aggressive monetary policy in a bid to rein in inflation.

According to the Canadian Real Estate Association, average home prices have fallen from a peak of more than Can\$800,000 (US\$590,000) at the start of 2022 to just over Can\$630,000 (US\$465,000) last month.

Many experts have also said the ban

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A local resident walks on an empty street filled with destroyed vehicles in the village of Torske in the occupied Donetsk region, Ukraine. Russia yesterday admitted dozens of its soldiers were killed in a Ukrainian strike on Russian-controlled territory in Donetsk. The recently taken photo was released yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## COVID SURGE IN CHINA Some return to regular activity

REUTERS, Beijing

Some people in the Chinese cities of Beijing, Shanghai and Wuhan braved the cold and a rise in Covid-19 infections to return to regular activity yesterday, raising the prospect of a boost to the economy as more recover from infections.

Among those who gathered to sled or ice skate on a frozen lake in the capital’s Shichahai Lake Park, some were upbeat about the opening-up after China dropped stringent “zero-Covid” measures on Dec. 7 to adopt a strategy of living with the virus.

The switch followed protests over the policy championed by President Xi Jinping, marking the strongest show of public defiance in his

decade-old presidency and coinciding with grim growth figures for the country’s \$17 trillion economy.

However, a wave of infections has erupted nationwide since the dismantling of the zero-Covid policy, fuelling international concern and prompting some countries to impose curbs on travellers from China.

Qatar on Monday joined a growing list of countries, including the United States, India and others, which have imposed Covid tests for travellers from China over concerns about the scale of the new outbreak and scepticism over Beijing’s health statistics.

European Union government health officials

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## LPG cylinder price cut by Tk 65

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Energy Regulatory Commission (BERC) has reduced the price of liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) to Tk 102.70 a kg from Tk 108.09 per kg.

As per the new price, a 12kg LPG cylinder will now cost Tk 1,232 instead of Tk 1,297.

The new price came into effect from 6:00pm yesterday.

LPG prices for other sizes of cylinders -- from 5.5kg to 45kg -- will go

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## UP chairman on remand in Jubo Dal activist murder case

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Tangail

A Tangail court yesterday remanded a union parishad chairman in a case filed over the murder of a Jubo Dal activist in an instance of pre-poll violence in 2018.

Hekmat Shikder, 50, chairman of Sagardighi Union Parishad in Ghatail upazila, was arrested from the Tangail bus stand area on Sunday afternoon.

On the night of March 28, 2018, a day before the Sagardighi UP elections, several hundred agitated people besieged a local polling centre after being informed that the ballot papers were snatched by Hekmat Shikder’s men.

To disperse the angry mob, Hekmat’s men opened fire inside the centre where a local Jubo Dal activist sustained a bullet injury and succumbed to his injuries on the spot.

## Body recovered from sewage drain

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Police yesterday recovered a dead body of a man from a sewage drain in Khulna town.

Mizanur Rahman Mukul, 53, was a computer operator for a pharmaceutical company.

Khulna Sadar Police Station Officer in Charge Hasan Al Mamun said, “The cause of death is not known. An unnatural death case has been registered in this regard,” he added.

## Teacher arrested for ‘stealing textbooks’

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Dinaipur

Police Sunday night arrested a school teacher for allegedly stealing this year’s new textbooks in Dinaipur’s Khanama.

Montu Ali, 45, acting headmaster of Kumria Dwimukhi High School, was sent to jail via a court order yesterday, said Khansama Police Station OC Chittaranjan Roy.

The school authorities distributed around 410 sets of textbooks among its students of different classes on Sunday, in presence of local dignitaries.

Later in the afternoon, another teacher of the school, Moksed Ali, called the police saying that the textbooks went missing from the school storeroom and accused Montu Ali.

Meanwhile, Montu claimed it was a conspiracy against him as part of his long-standing dispute with Moksed.

## Ctg port’s anomalies cost govt

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the direction of the ministry.”

CPA is yet to pay Tk 7 crore to the contractor for the boat, Shahjahan said.

“But we are using the boat for several months now and earning money off it. Am I making a loss or profit for the government by doing this? We did not pay a single penny anywhere violating any rule,” he added.

There was also a loss of Tk 87.45 crore for non-recovery of the port authority’s share of sales proceeds of auctioned goods by the Chattogram Custom authority between fiscal 2017-18 and fiscal 2019-20, the audit found.

In another case, CPA’s marine department on June 25, 2018 signed a deal with Chittagong Dry Dock Limited for docking and repairing MT Kandari-1 for Tk 12.68 crore.

The work order was issued on the same day and no timeline was mentioned for the completion of the

works. The contractor submitted a bill three days later showing that the work was completed, and CPA made the full payment on July 11, 2018.

“It is not possible to complete a work involving such a huge amount of money in just three days,” the CAG said in the report.

Noticing defects in the vessel, its engine driver sought repair on August 2, 2018. “This proves that the ship was not repaired as per the terms of the contract before.”

The contractor refused to do further repairs even though the defects were observed within the contractor’s defect liability period, the report said.

The state coffers were also deprived of Tk 32.27 crore after CPA’s accounts and finance department deducted income tax from the bill of berth operators at a rate prescribed by the National Board of Revenue from fiscals 2017-18 to 2019-20, the CAG found.

Another Tk 30 crore was lost for

CPA’s estate department’s failure to collect rent from companies for CPA’s properties leased out.

Despite not achieving the set targets, the port authority gave Tk 29.27 crore as incentive bonus among its officers and staff in fiscal 2019-20.

This was counted as an irregularity by the CAG, which has called for collecting the amount given out in incentive bonus back from the officers and employees.

There was a financial loss of Tk 10.9 crore for CPA’s rental of cars and minibuses overshooting the ceiling set by the finance ministry for such expenses, the report said.

Subsequently, CAG called for recovery of the disputed amount.

The port also suffered a financial loss of Tk 50 lakh as several officials and staff received the amount showing expenses during foreign tours without submitting any reconciliation bills and vouchers even after accepting airfares and all other allowances.

## Small vehicles shoot up, so do accidents

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than all the vehicles registered between independence and 2017 -- 27.79 lakh. The number of bikes registered in the last six years is 23.14 lakh.

The number of three-wheelers, especially easy-bikes and locally-made Nosimon and Korimon, started to swell since early last decade and the authorities had to ban three-wheelers on 22 major highways in August 2015 as they were involved in a large number of crashes.

Yet, these vehicles continue to ply the highways and their numbers increased to such a point that some bus routes had to be cancelled. People often prefer these vehicles as they do not have to wait too long for a ride.

Transport sector insiders believe there are 30-40 lakh three-wheelers in the country.

**RISE IN CRASHES, DEATHS**

The numbers of crashes and deaths last year are highest since 2015 and 19.89 percent and 27.43 percent, respectively, higher than those of 2021, said Mozammel Hoque Chowdhury, secretary general of Jatri Kalyan Samity.

The Samity revealed the data, prepared from media reports, at a press conference at the Dhaka Reporter’s Unity yesterday.

Of those who died last year, 3,090 were drivers, 1,503 pedestrians, 742

transport workers, 885 students, 132 teachers, 283 law enforcers, 44 journalists, 31 physicians, 29 engineers, 18 freedom fighters, and 168 were political activists.

Out of 9,616 vehicles involved in road crashes, 13.95 percent were buses, 24.5 percent trucks, pickups, and lorries, 6.95 percent cars, SUVs and minibuses, 28.59 percent were bikes and 25.96 percent were different kinds of three-wheelers, read the report.

Motorbikes’ involvement increased by 3 percent last year compared to that of the previous year, it read.

Mozammel said the number of motorcycles and easy-bikes went up manifold over the last eight years and these ply national highways, despite government bans.

Instead of introducing a safe and modern public transport system, the country is heading towards a system dependent on bikes and easy-bikes, which increases the number of crashes, he added.

The organisation identified 20 reasons behind the road crashes and made 13 recommendations to prevent crashes and casualties.

Prof Mizanur Rahman, also a former director of Accident Research Institute of Buet, said the communication system in Bangladesh is one-dimensional, over

dependent on roads.

The number of vehicles is higher than the capacity of country’s road network, which results in crashes, he told The Daily Star yesterday.

Besides, recklessness of drivers and road users are also responsible for high number of crashes, he added.

The country saw a sharp rise in motorcycles over the last few years and it is a major reason behind the rise in road crashes, he said, adding that the authority should take initiatives to rein in the number of bikes.

In July last year, the BRTA announced it would not issue registration for motorcycles after September 15 if the owner did not have a driver’s licence.

But the authorities were forced to defer the date twice following pressure from bike manufactures and importers.

Secretary Nuri said bike manufactures and importers bring in a lot of revenue and the government cannot go tough on them overnight.

Experts and road safety campaigners said economic growth and the lack of public transport contributes to the rise in vehicles, particularly bikes and cars, but the authorities, particularly the BRTA and police, do not have the manpower to regulate and monitor these vehicles and enforce the laws.

## Russian gas exports outside ex-Soviet states fell 45.5pc in 2022

AFP, Moscow

Russian gas exports to countries outside a group of former Soviet republics plunged by 45.5 percent in 2022, figures from gas giant Gazprom showed yesterday.

Gazprom said in a statement that exports outside the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) totalled 100.9 billion cubic metres compared to 185.1 billion in 2021.

Europe was previously Gazprom’s main export market but supplies have been drastically reduced because of sanctions following Russia’s offensive in Ukraine in 2022.

Gazprom CEO Alexei Miller said the company had been steadily increasing supplies to China during the year but did not give details on the quantities.

“From January 1 we are on a fundamentally new level of gas

supplies to China,” Miller said in the statement.

President Vladimir Putin last month inaugurated the Kovykta natural gas field in eastern Siberia that will allow Russia to increase its exports to China.

Russia does not have pipelines to transport gas from its Western Siberian and Arctic gas fields -- which have served Europe -- to China.

## Exports hit record on Christmas cheer

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international retailers and brands are also paying better prices, Hassan said.

However, export trends may not continue in the coming months as the cost of living crisis hits the US, the EU and the UK, he said, adding that the work orders may increase from March onwards.

“It has become clear that in the backdrop of growing geopolitical rivalry, Bangladesh’s position in the garment supply chain would further consolidate -- this is what we saw in 2022,” said MA Razzaque, research director of the Policy Research Institute.

However, the momentum seen in export earnings in the previous six months would not continue in the first six months of the year given the

recession in Europe and the US, the major shipping destinations.

“This will certainly create a downward pressure on the demand for clothing,” Razzaque added.

Between July and December last year, exports fetched \$27.31 billion, up 10.58 percent year-on-year. Garment shipments raked in about \$23 billion, up 15.56 percent.

As the second highest export earner, leather and leather goods shipment grew 13 percent to \$637.29 million in the July-December period.

Shipment of non-leather footwear items also increased 17.84 percent year-on-year to \$250.8 million in the first six months of fiscal 2022-23, while plastic goods export soared 40.97 percent to \$100.17 million.

submitting a plan.

This work had earlier been done manually.

Rajuk started issuing land use clearance certificate digitally for all zones in 2018. It also began issuing building plan approvals in May 2019.

Clients can apply for land use plan certificates and approvals of building plans by registering with https://cp.rajuk.gov.bd.

On August 23, last year, Rajuk approved a Detailed Area Plan (DAP).

Sources at Rajuk said according to DAP, people could now construct buildings with lesser height, than usual, in most areas.

On requests from landowners and realtors, Rajuk decided that those who submitted their land use plan applications before the gazette notification regarding the DAP could construct their buildings as

per earlier rules when there was a scope for constructing buildings with greater heights, they said.

Rajuk published a notice in this regard on December 4. Just a day after, Rajuk website crashed, sources said.

A section of people might have been involved in this to show that they submitted their documents before the gazette notification was issued, the sources said.

Kazi Mohammad Mahbul Haque, chief of the department of management information system at Rajuk, however, said all the data submitted was still in the Rajuk servers.

Only the documents uploaded by applicants are missing, he added.

“The work of recovering the documents is going on and we are hopeful of completing the work shortly.”