

## Five of a family burnt in housefire

### STAR REPORT

Five members of a family suffered burn injuries in a housefire in Dhaka's Dhamrai early yesterday.

The fire broke out following an explosion, said neighbours.

Manjurul Islam, 35, a garment worker, his wife Jusra Begum, 25, their one-and-a-half-year-old daughter Mariyam Akter, Jusra's sister Hosna Akter, 30, and her niece Sadia Akter, 18, were injured.

They were admitted to Sheikh Hasina National Institute of Burn and Plastic Surgery.

Sadia sustained 75 percent burns, Jusra 40 percent, Mariam 15 percent, Hosna 25 percent and Manjurul 33 percent, said SM Ayub Hossain, resident surgeon at the institute.

Shamim Mondal, a firefighter at Dhamrai Fire Station, said they were not informed about the fire.

The incident took place around 5:00am on the ground floor of a two-storey building near Kumrail graveyard.

"We heard a loud bang when we were asleep. We rushed to the house and saw smoke coming out of the house," said Nizam Sheikh, a neighbour of the victims.

## ATTACK ON THE MRO Case finally filed after six days

### STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A case has been filed six days after the incident of torching and vandalism of at least a dozen Mro community homes at Rengyan Mro Para of Sorai union of Bandarban's Lama upazila on January 2.

Rengweng Mro Karbari (village head) filed the case with Lama Police Station today naming 10 people and 150 to 170 unnamed, reports our Bandarban correspondent quoting Shahidul Islam Chowdhury, officer-in-charge of the police station.

Lama Rubber Industries Limited's Chairman Syed Moazzem Hossain, 62, and Project Coordinator Md Kamal Uddin, 60, were among the 10 named accused.

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## Govt doing

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working committee and advisory council at the party's Tungipara office in Gopalganj.

Hasina said the AL government, the party, its leaders and activists are always beside the distressed people.

"Our aim is to ensure a better life for the people of this country and we will work tirelessly to achieve that aim."

The PM also said Bangladesh is making progress in terms of socioeconomic development and changes are taking place in the people's status in that regard.

"We have been able to ensure food for people at the grassroots. We are providing homes for the homeless and landless. No one will be homeless, landless and without an address in the land of Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman."

Hasina said the whole world plunged into an economic recession due to Covid-19 and the Ukraine-Russia war. "But, by the grace of Almighty, we have been able to continue turning the wheels of the country's economy till now."

She briefly described various development activities of the government for the overall advancement of the country.

The PM said due to the war the government has had to buy various items like edible oil, fuel, sugar, lentils, wheat and corn at higher prices to provide those to the poor and lower-income people at fair prices.

She also mentioned the government has been providing various essentials to the people across the country for free.

"We are spending a huge amount of money in this regard just to ease the burden of the general people, whatever the prices of those items in the world market may be."

Hasina urged all to utilise arable land to produce something, no matter the quantity.

She visited Puber Beel in Tungipara's Patgati union yesterday morning to see how vegetables and other crops were being grown on floating beds, and asked the people of the country to cultivate all the fallow land.

Sheikh Hasina was elected AL president for the 10th consecutive term, while Obaidul Qader was re-elected as general secretary for the third time at the party's 22nd national council held in Dhaka on December 24.

## Australia looks to boost trade, promote defence cooperation

*The risk of conflict in the Indo-Pacific is increasing. Australia, one of the major powers in the region, is gearing up its relations with countries including Bangladesh. How would relations between Australia and Bangladesh look like in future? Jeremy Bruer, Australian high commissioner to Bangladesh, shared details with Porimol Palma of The Daily Star.*

**The Daily Star (DS):** How has the bilateral relationship been so far and where does it stand now?

**Jeremy Bruer (JB):** Australia has been a strong friend of Bangladesh since before independence. In 1971, Australia quickly provided emergency aid to those displaced by the war, and we have continued to provide support ever since. Now, Australia is supporting a wide range of development investments to support Bangladesh's transition to a middle-income country. Our longstanding Strategic Partnership (SPA) with Brac means that Australian aid reaches a large number of people and areas of Bangladesh. We are contributing \$85 million over the next five years to the third phase of SPA. We're also supporting viable private sector opportunities through Australia's new Emerging Markets Impact Investment Fund and the Business Partnerships Platform.

There is great complementarity between our two markets—Australia exports materials that Bangladesh needs to manufacture goods, including for export to countries like Australia. Australian businesses are increasingly interested in Bangladesh due to the rise in demand of our high-quality products and services and the improved infrastructure linkages and regional connectivity in the Bay of Bengal region.

Australian businesses see further opportunities to diversify trade and investment with Bangladesh in textiles and apparel, agricultural products such as wool, agribusiness, fisheries, food and beverages, minerals, manufacturing, ICT services, skills development and education services.

Australia is also well placed to supply energy resources, such as LNG, to help fuel Bangladesh's growing demand for electricity. We are also seeking to increase defence cooperation with Bangladesh given our mutual interests in supporting regional stability.

strengthening our defence cooperation and promoting a secure, prosperous and inclusive Indo-Pacific.

**DS:** Australia and Bangladesh last year signed the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement (TIFA). What are the investments Australia is planning in Bangladesh?

**JB:** Australia hosted the first talks with Bangladesh under the TIFA in February this year. This was a significant achievement. We recognise the strength and depth of the economic relationship and the opportunities to grow and diversify trade.

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**DS:** Australia is putting high importance on security cooperation in the Indian Ocean region. What are your plans with Bangladesh in this regard?

**JB:** Australia and Bangladesh



share interests in ensuring the Indian Ocean region remains secure, open and prosperous. Australia is exploring ways to work with regional partners, including Bangladesh, to support regional stability. Australia's Defence Strategic Update (2020) identifies the North East Indian Ocean as part of our immediate region where we need to tighten the focus of our defence planning and engagement.

We value our longstanding cooperation on combating people- and drug-smuggling and other illegal maritime ventures. One priority area for cooperation in the near future is in peace operations training and preparation. Recognising the high importance of the relationship with Bangladesh, our first resident defence adviser arrived in Dhaka in mid-August. We look forward to strengthening defence cooperation between Australia and Bangladesh. Australia and

Bangladesh have participated in a number of multilateral exercises together.

**DS:** Myanmar's turmoil and the Rohingya crisis have left Bangladesh and the whole region in trouble. Is it possible to advance the region's development without addressing the Myanmar crisis?

**JB:** The situation in Myanmar is extraordinarily challenging, but Australia is committed to working closely with Bangladesh and with ASEAN, among others, to foster peace. We are advocating for accountability for crimes committed through the International Court of Justice, the Independent Investigative Mechanism for Myanmar and the International Criminal Court.

We have consistently made clear Australia's strong support for ASEAN's regional leadership in responding to the crisis. We continue to urge the Myanmar military to honour its commitment to ASEAN's leaders to implement the Five Point Consensus.

To signal our desire for peace on the global stage, Australia cosponsored the UN resolution on the "Situation of human rights of Rohingya Muslims and other minorities in Myanmar" last year. Australia is continuing to maintain pressure on the Myanmar regime. Even as we seek a durable solution, Australia remains committed to supporting Bangladesh as it hosts the Rohingya. Since August 2017, we have provided almost \$350 million in humanitarian assistance in Cox's Bazar. We keep our sanctions regime under active review and strongly support a global arms embargo against Myanmar.

## In grip of bitter cold

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Meteorological Department.

The fog coming from the country's rivers and the Ganges basin has created a thick layer that is obstructing the sunlight from breaking through.

"The situation will improve if the fog becomes thinner," he said, adding that the temperature may rise slightly today only to fall further later this week.

The temperature in most parts of the country decreased over the past few days, said Omar Faruk, another meteorologist.

A mild cold wave is sweeping across Rajshahi division and the districts of Faridpur, Madaripur, Kishoregonj, Dinajpur, Nilphamari, Panchagarh, Jashore, Chuadanga, Kushtia, Satkhira and Barisal and it may abate in some places, said the Met Office bulletin.

Temperature between 8 and 10 degrees Celsius is considered a mild

cold wave, 6 and 8 degrees Celsius a moderate cold wave and less than 6 degrees Celsius a severe cold wave, met office sources said.

It feels colder than the readings suggest as the temperature has been more or less constant during the day and night, according to Bazlur Rashid, a meteorologist.

The difference in day and night temperature in the country is now less than 10 degrees Celsius.

As a result of the cold wave, childhood pneumonia cases and deaths have increased around the country as reflected in the number of patients in the two major hospitals of Dhaka.

Last month, 437 children with pneumonia were admitted to Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute (BSHI) in Dhaka, up about 25 percent from November.

So far this month, 43 children died

from the disease Shishu Hospital and a similar number of patients died in December, said Jahangir Alam, director of BSHI.

The number of child pneumonia patients is also increasing at Dhaka Medical College Hospital (DMCH). On average, over the last seven days, 10 children are being admitted to the hospital. In November, the average 2 or 3 children, said Ifat Ara Shamsad, head of DMCH's paediatric department.

It is a similar scenario over at Thakurgaon.

On average, 150 people are admitted in the children's ward against 45 beds while about 350 people are admitted in the adult wards against 205 beds, said Noor Newaz, civil surgeon of Thakurgaon. Most of them are suffering from cold-related diseases.

The same situation is prevailing in Panchagarh Sadar Hospital, said Taufiq

my family without having to face any threats or obstacles."

In December, Ankita applied for the MBA programme at DU. She proved her merit with outstanding results yet again.

She, however, had lost hope of getting into the prestigious institution as the high tuition fees were nearly impossible for a young professional like Ankita to manage on her own.

That is when Ho Chi Minh Islam, a rights activist and trans woman herself, came forward.

With her help, Ankita managed to get an appointment with the university's vice chancellor, to whom she explained her issues.

"The vice chancellor was moved after hearing my stories of struggle and assured me that my tuition fees would be fully waived. I applied for the scholarship and my dream of studying at Dhaka University finally came true."

Ankita never forgets what she had to lose to achieve everything that she has now.

"Trans people are some of the most marginalised people in Bangladesh. We aren't allowed live peacefully in society, we can't raise families, we can hardly get jobs. As a matter of fact, we hardly have any rights as citizens."

"However, people like Ho Chi Minh, who is a nurse in a government hospital, and I are proof that if we fight hard enough for our rights, we can get them. We can pursue a higher education, get dignified jobs and contribute to the development of our country."

"And I want to dedicate the rest of my life to establishing these fundamental rights of trans people in Bangladesh."

"I can now go to my village and visit

Ahmed, the hospital's resident medical officer.

In Bhola, hundreds of fishing boats are standing on the banks of river Meghna at Nirb Machi Ghat of Dhaniya Union of Bhola Sadar Upazila. They could not go fishing in the river in the last three days.

Over 350 fishing boats along with 1,700 fishermen in the union are now stationed on the banks of the Meghna due to strong northerly winds.

Fisherman Amir Hossain said he is out of work for the last five days due to the strong cold wind.

"It is very difficult to stay in the crop field due to cooler wind coming from the north for a week," said Manowar Hossain, a farmer in the Chakelahat area of Panchagarh Sadar Upazila.

The daily income has dropped in the last few days as the number of passengers has reduced drastically

due to the chilling cold, said Rickshaw puller Kshitish Chandra Roy of Thakurgaon town.

The dense fog is also causing flight disruption at Dhaka airport in the last week.

Every flight is being diverted to different airports and almost all flights are delayed up to three to four hours due to the dense fog, said officials of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport.

Ferry services were suspended from 10:00pm yesterday on Paturia-Dalatdia route due to fog, reports our Manikganj correspondent.

BIWTA said ferries Shah Paran, Bir Shrestha Matiur Rahman, Shah Mokhdum and Hasna Hena got stranded mid river.

Meanwhile, 85-year-old Kamala Begum burnt to death while trying to warm herself with a fire inside her home in Singair of Manikganj.

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On the last day of the event today, police officials will meet ministers in the morning, the cabinet secretary in the afternoon, and the chief justice in the evening.

Officers did not place any demand before Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during the welfare parade at the capital's Rajarbagh Police Lines.

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## Rohingya leader stabbed to death in Ukhya

### OUR CORRESPONDENT, Cox's Bazar

A Rohingya community leader, locally known as "Majhi", was stabbed to death by criminals at a refugee camp in Ukhya upazila of Cox's Bazar yesterday.

Md Rafiq, 35, was from Jamtoli Camp 15 under the Palangkhali union, said police.

Witnesses said a group of criminals launched a sudden attack on Rafiq and stabbed him indiscriminately leaving him dead on the spot around 7:00pm.

Another community leader of the camp, on condition of anonymity, claimed that the attackers were members of the Arakan Rohingya Solidarity Army (Arsa).</