

PM for more bilateral trade with Brazil

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday emphasised the necessity of boosting trade cooperation between Bangladesh and Brazil as there is a huge prospect of expansion of trade and business between the two countries.

She made the remarks when Brazilian Ambassador to Bangladesh Paulo Fernando Dias Feres paid a courtesy call on her at Gono Bhaban.

Prime Minister's speech writer Md Nazrul Islam briefed reporters after the meeting.

Hasina requested the Brazilian government to take steps over the expansion of bilateral trade and business.

She stressed on signing preferential trade agreement (PTA) or free trade agreement (FTA) with Brazil and three other MERCOSUR (Southern common market) countries – Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay – soon.

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A child closely examines a kite in a shop, possibly thinking if this will be the one that wins him the kite-running competition on the day of Shakrain. With less than a week to go, kite sales are slowly picking up as Old Dhaka residents prepare for the festivities. This photo was taken in Shakhariabazar yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Old Dhaka gears up for Shakrain

DIPAN NANDY

For Dhaka residents, when the winter breeze starts flowing through the city, it almost brings about a calling – a calling to fly kites.

This is why every year, the month of January is one that is awaited, since it is the month that brings Shakrain – a traditional kite festival usually held in the alleys of Old Dhaka.

With only five days left, the excitement for the festival is already brewing in Old Dhaka's streets. But nowadays, Shakrain is now not only limited to the Old Dhaka residents; it has become an iconic festival for all dwellers of Dhaka.

Every year, Shakrain is observed on January 14 and 15, to celebrate Makar Sangkranti, the last day of the Bangla month Poush.

Long time residents of Old Dhaka said eating pitha made with new rice, and flying kites on the occasion are an age-old tradition. "Buro-Buri" puja will be held in temples on the eve of the festival as well.

During the festival, kites start flying above roofs, amid the morning mist. As the day progresses, the festivities take on a new colour. The afternoon ends with a game of kite flying, while the night sky is illuminated with fireworks.

Preparations for the festival were seen in Shankharibazar, Tantibazar, Narinda, Sutrapur and Laxmibazar areas of Old Dhaka on Sunday.

Kites and natai (kite reels) are being sold at small shops. Many have started a seasonal business of selling kites.

Saddam Hossain, who came to Shankharibazar to buy kites, said they celebrate the festival on the rooftops and

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A man is sleeping here

Scenes from Dhaka footpaths on a winter night



PHOTO: STAR

SUMON ALI

It was 2:00am in Dhaka. The bone-chilling winter breeze was blowing ferociously. The roads were quiet. A few trucks occasionally sped through the capital's deserted streets. This reporter noticed a man trembling inside a plastic bag, trying his best to seek refuge from the cold amidst the eerie atmosphere, near Panthapath intersection.

"All I have is a mat, a thin blanket, and a plastic bag. I'm still having trouble falling asleep. This is no way to live," he said.

Nearby, 6-year-old Tara was sleeping with her mother. They sell flowers during the day.

At night, they sleep on the footpaths with the help of two thin blankets.

"Why are you still awake?" the reporter asked Tara. "How can I sleep in this cold?" she promptly replied. When asked about her father, she simply said, "He's dead." No emotions were present on her face.

Her mother Masuda added, "We make an average of Tk 200 per day." She and Tara recently moved to Dhaka from Barishal, leaving two of her children behind.

"We send a portion of the money home. We hardly manage three square meals a day with the remainder," she added.

This correspondent talked with 10 people from different places of the capital on Thursday night, from 12:00am to 2:30am. They all had similar stories to tell.

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JS body gets 90 more days to examine media bill

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The parliamentary watchdog on information ministry yesterday got another 90 days to examine the much-debated Mass Media Employees (Services Conditions) Bill 2022.

This is for the third time the chairman of the parliamentary standing committee, Hasanul Huq Inu, sought more time, as it could not scrutinise the bill to place it before the House.

The House unanimously approved the committee chief's proposal for extension.

On March 28 last year, Information Minister Hasan Mahmud placed the bill, and it was sent to the committee for scrutiny.

In June and August last year, the Jatiya Sangsad (JS) body sought 60 days for scrutiny.

According to sources, the watchdog did not sit for a single meeting till now.

Various journalists' organisations, owners' associations, and Transparency International Bangladesh have seriously opposed various sections of the proposed law.

The Editors' Council (Sampadak Parishad) has said the space for independent media will shrink further if the proposed bill is passed.

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Police turn AL man into BNP activist, put him behind bars

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and SHARIFUL ISLAM

He has been actively involved in Awami League politics in the capital's Kalyanpur area for over a decade. Local ruling party leaders know him quite well.

But what happened recently left Nizam Jomadder, 50, an AL member at ward-II, dumbfounded.

Mirpur police arrested him on November

"I've known Nizam for a long time and seen him in Awami League rallies and processions."

MOHAMMADULLAH KAWSAR
President of AL ward-II

1 in a case filed around six months ago against Jamaat-BNP men on charges of blocking roads and attacking police in Mirpur.

The incident had left several cops wounded.

He is not among the 10 named accused in the case, which also brought accusations against 300 to 350 unnamed people.

A team of Mirpur police detained him from his shop on the day, and showed him arrested in the case.

Sub-inspector Motiur Rahman in the forwarding letter placed before a Dhaka court identified Nizam as the former vice-president of BNP's ward-II unit and an active member of the party.

Nizam, who recently got out on bail after being in jail for a month, dismissed the police claim. "I'm involved with Awami League and never did BNP politics," Nizam told The Daily Star recently.

To verify Nizam's claim, this newspaper contacted several leaders of AL's ward-II and

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BRTA starts to collect fees from vehicles at new rate

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Bangladesh Road Transport Authority has started to collect fees at new rates from vehicle owners and drivers from yesterday.

It also started to collect a certain amount from vehicle owners for a to-be-made government fund for road accident victims.

Sitangshu Shekhar Biswas, director (engineering) of BRTA, confirmed the development to The Daily Star.

A vehicle owner, who went to BRTA's Mirpur office, said the authorities have already imposed the new rate from yesterday morning.

The fee hike comes after the government issued the rules for Road Transport Act-2018, for which a gazette was published on December 27.

Fees for 75 services, like registering vehicles and

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Bangladesh free from toxic DDT pesticide: minister

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Environment Minister Shahab Uddin officially declared Bangladesh free from dangerous DDT pesticide yesterday.

In 22 containers, the ministry with the help of other organisations safely shipped off the DDT between October 30 and December 10 last year, said the minister.

He made the announcement at a press conference organised at the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change.

Earlier, about 500 tonnes of pesticide was stored at the Chattogram Government Medical Sub Depot warehouse for 37 years. It was imported by the Directorate of Health in 1985 for the implementation of the Malaria Control Programme.

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Shifting of NID service won't create problem

Says EC Rashida Sultana

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

There will be no crisis in providing NID services whether the responsibility remains with the Election Commission or goes to the home ministry, said Election Commissioner Rashida Sultana yesterday.

She was talking to the reporters after the EC held a meeting with technical experts on the issue of NID services at its office in Dhaka.

She said some experts opined that the NID activities should remain with EC while others termed the service a burden on the commission. "We took the opinions to make a right decision, avoiding any issue over the matter. We will take the final decision after a discussion at the commission meeting," she said.

Former Buet teacher and Brac University Professor Mohammad Kaykobad told the journalists that the EC has the experience of providing NID services. "We should utilise the experience."

"Wherever the NID service management goes, no other institute has the experience, as EC does. So, the authorities should utilise it and save costs," he said.

After the meeting, Prof Muhammed Zafar Iqbal said the database must be identical wherever it is being stored. There is no disagreement over it, he said. "It doesn't matter where the NID activities are given."

Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habibur Awal along with other election commissioners and senior officials of the EC were present at the meeting.

Jica to resume sending volunteers to Bangladesh

DIPLOMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Japan is going to resume sending volunteers to Bangladesh from July this year, seven years after the programme was suspended following the Gulshan café attack in 2016.

At least seven Japanese nationals, who were working for Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica), were killed in the attack prompting it to suspend sending volunteers.

Japan Embassy Second Secretary Yamamoto Kyohei wrote in his Facebook post yesterday that the application process in eight categories of professions for three Bangladeshi institutions near Dhaka has begun.

The institutions include Bangladesh Krira Siksha Protishthan, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute and Bangladesh Computer Council.

LAST DAY OF DHAKA LIT FEST

Literature too can be a party

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The last day of the 10th Dhaka Lit Fest began yesterday on a calmer note than weekends.

The morning sessions opened with conversations on the future of urbanism, the plights of street children as explored in Rubaiya Murshed's "Nobody's Children" (UPL), the future of poetry, micro tales by Sehri Tales, and sexism in the world of gaming.

Besides, Nobel laureate Abdulrazak Gurnah discussed his novel "Desertion" with Bloomsbury publisher Alexandra Pringle.

The Bangla Academy grounds began to fill up as the afternoon sessions began. Prof Firdous Azim moderated a session on feminist scholars and writers, with Prof Sabiha Huq, emeritus reader of postcolonial literature Denise deCaires Narain, and International Booker Prize-winning translator Daisy Rockwell.

Political and cultural analyst Pankaj Mishra discussed "Run and Hide", the first novel he has written in 25 years, in conversation with writer Vivek Menezes. Daily Star Books' discussion on "Is



Speakers at The Daily Star Books' discussion on "Is a Book Worth Reading: Who Decides?" on the last day of Dhaka Lit Fest on Bangla Academy premises yesterday.

PHOTO: STAR

a Book Worth Reading: Who Decides?", moderated by DS Books editor Sarah Anjum Bari, brought forth discussions about the value of book reviews, the politics of selecting school and university curricula, and censorship in the literary world.

Alongside workshops and sessions on haiku poetry, "Dhaka and its dystopia", and translation, crowds were drawn to Kishwar Chowdhury's DLF Innovation Talk on the culinary arts.

Right before the closing ceremony, 2022 Booker Prize winner and Sri Lankan author Shehan Karunatilaka discussed his Booker-winning novel "The Seven Moons of Maali Almeida" with one of South Asia's most prolific literary agents Kanishka Gupta.

The premises filled up to brim when the musical performance of the night by Coke Studio began at 7:00pm. Despite delays in starting and less than satisfactory sound quality, hundreds of audience members gathered to watch Animes Roy, Pantha Kanai, Momtaz, Ritu Raj and other Coke Studio artists.

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