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SHAH CEMENT

Matia elected deputy leader of the House

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Awami League Presidium Member and former minister Matia Chowdhury has been elected the deputy leader of the House.

AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader proposed her name for the position at a meeting of its parliamentary party (ALPP) at the Jatiya Sangsad Bhaban last night.

The proposal was seconded by ALPP Secretary Noor-E-Alam Chowdhury Liton, also the Jatiya Sangsad chief whip.

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina chaired the meeting. Some party leaders had assumed that Matia would become the country's next president. But AL President Hasina wants her to perform duties as the deputy leader of the House, party insiders said.

The post of the deputy leader of the House fell vacant after Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury died on September 11 last year.

A former presidium member of the ruling AL, Sajeda was appointed for the third consecutive term as the deputy leader of the 11th parliament.

The AL has been in power for three consecutive terms since 2009. The party now has an absolute majority in parliament.

From 2009 till her death, Sajeda had been the deputy



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OUT-OF-SCHOOL LESSONS ... A student observes the murals painted on the boundary walls of SFX Green Herald International School in the capital's Mohammadpur, on his way back home with his mother yesterday afternoon. The authorities of the school have put up the murals to teach children about how to be good citizens -- such as following traffic rules, taking an interest in the arts, planting trees as part of saving the environment, assisting the elderly etc.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

BROILER CHICKEN 'It poses no health risk'

Says agri minister citing lab tests

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Agriculture Minister Abdur Razzaque yesterday said there was no health risk in consuming broiler chicken, as the levels of antibiotic and heavy metal found in its meat was much lower than the permissible limit.

Broiler chicken meat, bones and composites mainly contain trace amounts of two antibiotics (oxytetracycline and doxycycline) and three heavy metals (arsenic, chromium and lead), which is not unusual, he said while disclosing findings of a research conducted by Bangladesh Agriculture Research Council (BARC).

He added, "Furthermore, the levels were far below the maximum acceptable level."

Mohammad Rafiqul Islam, chief scientific officer (livestock division) of BARC, led the research

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'Guitarist's guitarist' Jeff Beck no more

REUTERS

Jeff Beck, the influential, genre-bending English guitarist who rose to fame with The Yardbirds before embarking on a solo career, has died at the age of 78, his family announced on social media on Wednesday.

He passed away peacefully on Tuesday after suddenly contracting bacterial meningitis, the family said.

Beck is a two-time Rock & Roll Hall of Fame inductee - in 1992 for his work with The Yardbirds and as a solo performer in 2009. In 2015, Rolling Stone magazine ranked Beck as the fifth greatest guitarist of all time, one spot ahead of blues icon

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EXTRAJUDICIAL KILLINGS

Numbers drop sharply since US sanctions

Says HRW report on Bangladesh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Numbers of extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances have dropped drastically in Bangladesh since the US imposed sanctions on Rab and seven of its former and current officials for alleged human rights abuses, the Human Rights Watch observed in its annual report.

Released yesterday, the HRW report said the drop shows that the authorities have the ability curb incidents of abuse by security forces. It, however, also mentioned that enforcement agencies continued to repress opposition activists last year.

"Following the US Global Magnitsky human rights sanctions against Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion [RAB] and some of its top commanders in December 2021, extrajudicial killings and enforced disappearances dropped dramatically, indicating that authorities have the ability to bring security force abuses under control," the report said.

However, instead of taking steps toward reforms, the authorities launched a campaign of threats and intimidation against human rights defenders and families of victims of enforced disappearances, it added.

Starting in August last year, there was an increase in attacks against political opposition members, raising concerns about violence and repression ahead of the upcoming parliamentary elections, stated the report.

It mentioned that the government went to lengths to

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15.31KM ELEVATED ROAD IN HAOR

Govt may embark on Tk 5,651cr project

MD ASADUZ ZAMAN

The government has a plan to undertake a Tk 5,651-crore project to construct a 15.31km elevated road in the haor region of Kishoreganj to establish the district's direct road links with Dhaka, Sylhet and other districts.

The initiative is aimed at ensuring smooth road communications in all seasons in the hoar areas and transporting agri-products easily.

It will help flourish tourism in the country's northeastern region, Planning Commission documents say.

Amid the government's call for austerity measures, the spending of Tk 5,651 crore on the project has sparked criticism.

Experts urged the government not to take up such a big project.

However, the government says it is going to undertake the project considering the haor people's interest.

The project of constructing the elevated road from Mithamain upazila town to Morichkhali in Karimganj upazila of Kishoreganj may be placed before a meeting of the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (Ecne) on January 17 for approval, Planning Commission sources said.

The Bangladesh Bridge Authority is the implementing agency of the project.

Apart from the elevated road, the

authorities will also widen 13.40km road from Nakwanga intersection to Morichkhali Bazar under the project.

The Bureau of Research, Testing and Consultation of Buet carried out a feasibility study on the proposed elevated road.

The project is expected to start in March 2023 and be completed in June 2028. The government will fund the project.

"If the project is implemented, a road network will be established between Ina, Mithamain, and Astagram upazilas of Kishoreganj and its surrounding haor areas with Kishoreganj district town and Dhaka, Sylhet and other districts," according to the Planning Commission documents.

About the government austerity measures, Planning Minister MA Mannan said the government underscores the need for austerity, but never said about stopping development works.

The government has taken the project considering the interest of the haor people, he said.

"We never say that we will stop development works. If we do it, the economy will be ruined. We are taking up the project after verifying the viability of the project," said Mannan.

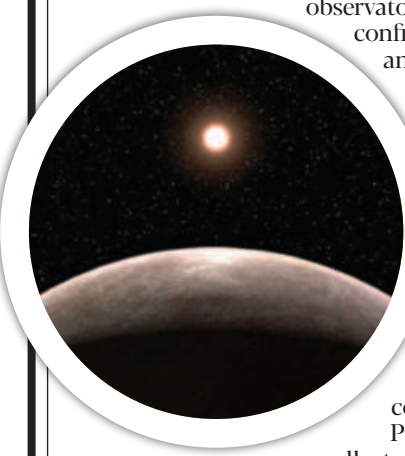
This project will not harm the environment anymore as we will build an

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Webb telescope discovers exoplanet for the first time

CNN ONLINE

The James Webb Space Telescope can add another cosmic accomplishment to its list: The space observatory has been used to confirm the existence of an exoplanet for the first time.



The celestial body, known as LHS 475 b and located outside of our solar system, is almost exactly the same size as Earth. The rocky world is 41 light-years away in the Octans constellation.

Previous data collected by Nasa's Transiting Exoplanet Survey Satellite, or TESS, had suggested the planet might exist.

A team of researchers, led by staff astronomer Kevin Stevenson and postdoctoral fellow Jacob Lustig-Yaeger at Johns Hopkins University Applied Physics Laboratory in Laurel, Maryland, observed the target using Webb. They watched for dips in starlight as the planet passed in front of its host star, called a transit, and watched two transits occur.

"There is no question that the planet is there. Webb's pristine data validate it," Lustig-Yaeger said in a statement.

The planet's discovery was announced

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THE ROLLER'S ARRIVAL

An Indian Roller about to land atop a wooden stump somewhere in Kushtia's Daulatpur upazila. This beautiful azure-coloured bird, as its name suggests, is found mostly in India, but is also distributed across south and central west Asia. While in India and Bangladesh, it is called "Neelkanth" or "Neelkontho", the English name "roller" is influenced by the aerobic displays the male performs to attract mates during breeding season -- something that has also inspired many an Asian dance form. This non-migratory bird usually prefers solitude, but once a mate is found, they share responsibility in incubating the eggs and nurturing the young until they are ready to fly independently.

While the Indian Roller prefers thin forests, grasslands and cultivated lands, they can also be found perched on tree branches, or electric wires in urban areas. The IUCN has listed it in its "least concern" category, but a decline in their population has been visible due to high numbers of traffic collision.

PHOTO: ARIF AHMED

Situation in Soledar 'difficult'

Says Kyiv; Russia puts chief of general staff in direct command of Ukraine invasion

AGENCIES

Ukraine said yesterday its forces were fighting to retain control of Soledar in the eastern Donetsk region but cautioned it was coming up against "difficult" resistance from Russian troops.

The Kremlin has made capturing the industrial region of Donetsk its primary objective after nearly one year of fighting that has seen its forces capitulate on larger goals like seizing the capital.

"The fiercest and heaviest fighting is continuing today in the area of Soledar," Ukraine's Deputy Defence Minister Ganna Malyar told reporters.

"Despite the difficult situation, Ukrainian soldiers are fighting stubbornly," she said. The Russians were "moving over their own corpses".

Malyar said Russia had increased the number of units in Ukraine to 280 from 250 in the past week as it seeks to regain the initiative.

Russian mercenary group Wagner claimed earlier this week its forces had captured Soledar, but the defence ministry in Moscow said fighting was ongoing and Ukraine denied any full takeover.

Both sides have conceded heavy losses in the fight for Soledar and the nearby larger town of Bakhmut, also key to Russia's aim to wrest all of Donetsk away from Ukraine.

The Kremlin yesterday praised the "heroic" work by

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