

Pregnant woman killed in truck-bike collision

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Jashore*

A pregnant woman was killed on her way to a hospital with her husband yesterday, when a truck hit their motorcycle in Jashore.

The deceased Shirin Akhtar, 25, was from Tajpur village of the district's Manirampur upazila, confirmed Manirampur Police Station Officer-in Charge Sheikh Mohammad Moniruzzaman.

Her husband, Ruhul Quddus, who was injured in the incident, said they were on their way to visit a gynaecologist at Queen's Hospital on a motorcycle around 10:30am.

When they reached Muragachha market, a truck coming from the opposite direction hit their motorcycle, seriously injuring both of them, he added.

After they were rescued and admitted to Jashore General Hospital, Shirin Akhtar died while undergoing treatment around 1:30pm.

Vichitra Mallick, a physician at the hospital's emergency department, said the husband and wife were brought in with serious injuries. "The pregnant woman died due to excessive bleeding. And her husband is currently receiving treatment."

OC Moniruzzaman said the body of the deceased was handed over to the family without conducting a postmortem.

Cuba takes reins of UN 'Group of 77 and China'

AFP, *United Nations*

Cuba on Thursday took over the rotating presidency of the Group of 77 and China, which advocates for developing countries' interests at the United Nations.

Cuban Foreign Minister Bruno Rodriguez took over leadership from last year's chair Pakistan.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said at the handover ceremony that in many ways, the Group of 77 and China reflects the goal of the United Nations itself.

"Year in and year out, you stand together to discuss, debate and amplify global solutions to realize the better, fairer and more sustainable future every country deserves," he said.

He also highlighted the challenges facing the world: growing poverty and inequalities, pandemics, recession, unemployment, climate change and the rights of women and girls being disrespected.

"While each challenge is different, they are all felt most keenly in the countries you represent," he added.



A photograph taken yesterday shows debris in front of a damaged building in the town of Siversk, Donetsk region amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

PHOTO: AFP

Full brunt of financial tightening 'yet to bite': IMF

AFP, *Washington*

Countries have yet to see the full impact of tightening financial conditions, IMF chief Kristalina Georgieva has said, warning that central banks have some way to go in their inflation battle.

Global growth is expected to slow further this year, as central banks including the US Federal Reserve have raised interest rates to cool surging prices.

While sectors like housing have been reeling in the United States for example, the labor market remains strong with low joblessness.

"As long as people are employed, even if prices are high, consumers spend.... But we all know that the impact of tightening financial conditions is yet to bite, in terms of unemployment," Georgieva told reporters on Thursday in a briefing on the world economy.

"Inflation remains stubborn, and in that sense, the job of central banks is not yet done," she said.

This suggests central banks may need to continue hiking interest rates, walking a fine line between easing demand and avoiding tipping economies into recession.

Doing so comes with risks, and Georgieva stressed the need to watch how

tightening conditions hit the labor market and possibly translate into "more tensions between employers and workers."

Governments have been quick to provide policy support thus far, adding a buffer between consumers and surging food and energy costs, but this policy space is "shrinking," she cautioned.

The International Monetary Fund also expects the global slowdown to "bottom out" towards year-end, and for the world economy to trend towards a higher growth trajectory in 2024, Georgieva said.

The IMF maintains that a "global recession can be avoided" even if some countries see downturns.

But this is subject to an absence of negative shocks like growing social unrest and spillovers between countries, climate events, or a worsening in Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"We are now in a more shock-prone world," she said.

While tighter financial conditions will have a "dramatic" impact on countries with high debt levels, Georgieva said the IMF does not see a "systemic debt crisis on the horizon."

She added that a new global sovereign debt roundtable is set to meet for the first time in February, on the sidelines of a Group of 20 finance officials meeting,

bringing key creditors and private finance together.

Weighing in on specific countries, Georgieva noted that China needs to "stay the course" in reopening from nearly three years of a strict zero-Covid policy that has battered business activity.

China's rebound from its latest surge in coronavirus cases since recently lifting lockdowns, quarantines and mass testing would have significant implications globally, she said.

The world's second biggest economy used to deliver up to 40 percent of world growth.

"What is most important is for China to stay the course, not to back off from that reopening," Georgieva said.

If so, it could turn into a "positive contributor" to average global growth by mid-year or thereabouts, she added.

Meanwhile, Georgieva expressed optimism over "remarkable" market resilience in the United States, with Covid-era support helping consumer demand in the world's biggest economy.

"It gives some... expectation that the US would avoid falling into a recession," she said, adding that a potential downturn will likely be very mild.

"For now, the dynamic seems to be more indicative for a soft landing," she said.

Child burned to death in Dinaipur

OUR CORRESPONDENT, *Dinaipur*

A five-year-old boy was burned to death in a housefire in Dinaipur's Parbatipur upazila around 10:45pm on Thursday.

Yusuf Imran, of Chandipur union, was sleeping when his house caught fire, said police.

Furnitures, cash and other valuables were also burned in the fire, said Abul Hasnat, officer-in-charge of Parbatipur Police Station.

The residents of the house, in association with the neighbours, could manage to extinguish the fire, he added.

The reason behind the fire could not be known immediately, he further said.

15 more Covid cases registered in 24hrs

UNB, *Dhaka*

Bangladesh registered 15 more Covid-19 cases in 24 hours till yesterday morning.

With the new numbers, the country's total caseload rose to 2,037,346, according to the Directorate General of Health Services.

However, the official death toll from the disease remained unchanged at 29,441 as no new fatalities were reported during this period.

The daily case test positivity rose to 0.51 percent from Thursday's 0.23 percent as 2,939 samples were tested during this time.

The mortality rate remained unchanged at 1.45 percent while the recovery rate slightly increased to 97.64 percent, it added.

In December last year, the country reported seven Covid-linked deaths and 540 cases.

Bangladesh registered its highest daily caseload of 16,230 on July 28 in 2021 and daily fatalities of 264 on August 5 the same year.

Shipbreaking worker dies after falling from ship

UNB, *Ctg*

A 24-year-old shipbreaking worker died after falling off a ship in Chattogram's Sitakunda Thursday night, said police.

The deceased is Abdul Rahim Tushar, of Kurigram.

Tushar fell off the ship while working on it at Tahsin Shipbreaking Yard in Sonaichhari union near the Bay of Bengal, Tofail Ahmed, officer-in-charge of Sitakunda Model Police Station, said.

"Tushar was rushed to Chattogram Medical College Hospital with a critical head injury. He was declared dead at the hospital at 10:00pm," he added.

Iran top diplomat hopes to restore Saudi ties

AFP, *Beirut*

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian expressed hope that diplomatic ties between Tehran and Riyadh could be restored through dialogue between the two regional arch-rivals, as he visited Lebanon yesterday.

Saudi Arabia cut ties with Iran in January 2016, after protesters attacked its embassy in Tehran and consulate in second city Mashhad following Riyadh's execution of Shiite cleric Nimr al-Nimr.

Almost entire family

FROM PAGE 1

"A burn patient with seriously damaged respiratory tract is considered to be critically ill," he said.

Speaking to this correspondent, Saju Basak said all family members were asleep around 2:00am when the fire broke out from a wood stove at the kitchen. The flames later spread to other rooms.

The blaze was brought under control around 4:00am with the help of five fire engines, said police and locals, adding that they recovered the five charred bodies from the house.

The fire might have originated from the wood burner in the kitchen of Khokon's tin-shed house in Mahajanpara area of Parua union, said Md Anwar Hossain Shamim, additional superintendent of police (Rangunia Circle).

According to neighbours, Khokon was the breadwinner for his family.

His autorickshaw, which was next to the kitchen of his house, was also damaged in the fire, they added.

First phase

FROM PAGE 1

Gazipur Metropolitan Police Commissioner Mollah Nazrul Islam said additional police personnel have been deployed in and around the Ijtima ground to ensure the security of the devotees. The venue has been brought under CCTV camera surveillance.

Also, the government set up health camps for the devotees to provide them with treatment like the previous years.

Meanwhile, another devotee died yesterday at the Ijtima venue due to old age complications. Two others died from cold-related illnesses on Thursday.

The first phase of Ijtima will end tomorrow with Akheri Munajat (final prayers).

US west coast girds for more damaging storms

AFP, *Los Angeles*

Western US states were bracing for yet more torrid weather yesterday and into the weekend as so-called atmospheric rivers lined up to dump heavy rain and snow across the already soaked region.

California has been battered by weeks of downpours that have killed at least 19 people, flooding communities, toppling power lines and threatening deadly mudslides.

Forecasters now say the first of two cyclones churning in the Pacific Ocean and bearing down on the west coast will spread the rain further north, forming a band from northern California to the states of Oregon and Washington.

"The most impactful precipitation will remain focused along the coasts of northern California and the Pacific Northwest through Friday night, then precipitation will expand south on Saturday and east on Sunday," the National Weather Service said in a Thursday statement.

"Northern California has been hammered with heavy precipitation events over the past couple weeks, and any additional rainfall could pose a threat of flash flooding."

Forecasters said they expect up to six inches (15 centimeters) of rain to fall over 48 hours near Seattle.

Avalanche warnings were in effect for a tranche of Washington state, with the storm bringing wetter, heavier snow into the mountains.

"Dangerous, large avalanches are expected to run naturally during this snowy, wet weather event," the Northwest Avalanche Center (NWAC) said.

So-called wet slab avalanches were a particular concern as the wetter snow piles up on top of fluffier, lighter snow, making the snowpack unstable.

"Wet slab avalanches are not something to tiptoe around, and this is a day where it's a good idea to stay off steep slopes and runouts beneath avalanche paths," the NWAC said.

In northern California, up to six feet (1.8 meters) of snow was forecast over the mountains between Friday and Tuesday, with winds gusting up to 50 miles (80 kilometers) an hour.

Final phase when Dhaka units ready

FROM PAGE 1

achieved. The intensity of the movement will increase and at some point, success will come."

Sources said the meeting discussed Dhaka city north BNP Convener Aman Ullah Aman's comment that Bangladesh will be run under the leadership of BNP Chairperson Khaleda Zia after December 10.

"Things got complicated after his (Aman's) statement. The party must seek an explanation from him why he made such a comment," said another standing committee member, wishing not to be named, adding that Tarique asked Fakhrul to look into it.

Meeting sources said a few members questioned Aman's loyalty to the party especially because he secured bail the day after he was arrested from the party office on December 7.

Aman, as the party's Dhaka north unit convener, was supposed to preside over the Nayapaltan sit-in on January 11. But he took the role of the

moderator while standing committee member Khandaker Mosharraf Hossain was in the chair.

Before this, a rumour spread that the Dhaka city north BNP would be dissolved. Tarique even particularly wanted to see the presence of the unit leaders and activists in the sit-ins.

When Mirza Abbas was addressing the audience during the Nayapaltan event, a central leader showed Tarique the presence of Dhaka north BNP leaders and activists through a video call.

The meeting also discussed the formation of "Samomona Ganatantrik Jote", which came into being with 15 organisations at the BNP chairperson's Gulshan office.

A standing committee member asked Tarique how can such an alliance can be formed right at the chairperson's office when the party is focusing on simultaneous movement.

Referring to Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader's mockery that 54 parties are against

Sheikh Hasina and it seems 54 horses will lay 54 eggs, the BNP leader said, "It needs to be known who was behind that sudden initiative [the alliance of 15]."

Currently, the 54 political parties and organisations are waging a simultaneous movement demanding election under a non-party interim government, BNP leaders say.

When the alliance of 15 organisations was announced, BNP standing committee member Iqbal Hasan Mahmud Tuku was there.

At Thursday's meeting, Tuku was present but another senior leader said the whole issue was orchestrated by Aman.

Then Mirza Fakhrul said, "Who gave Aman this authority?"

Aman could not be reached over the phone despite repeated attempts.

This correspondent contacted three other standing committee members about the issues but they declined to say anything on record.

1.7m students drop out

FROM PAGE 1

According to a DSHE report released in August 2022, at least 47,414 girls were victims of child marriage and 77,706 children became labourers in 2021. The data is from only 11,769 of the country's 20,960 secondary schools.

Prof Mohammad Tariq Ahsan of the Institute of Education and Research (IER) at Dhaka University said many of those, who had to leave the universities to take up jobs during the pandemic, found out whatever they had learnt in classrooms were of little use in "real life".

"They are thinking about the amount of money and time they must spend by returning to the educational

institutions to earn a certificate that may not even be useful in their jobs," he said.

There should be a "life-oriented" education system, he added.

To bring back the students, the authorities should keep their needs in mind and make school hours more flexible, he said, adding that the second-chance education programme should be strengthened by the primary education directorate.

Prof MA Mannan said the government should provide incentives to the students to bring them back to classrooms. They should be provided with technical and vocational training, he added.

US assistant secretary

FROM PAGE 1

Lu's visit comes less than a week after the visit of Rear Admiral Eileen Laubacher, senior director for South Asia at the US National Security Council. More US officials are likely to visit Dhaka later this month and the next.

"Besides election and human rights, we will talk about all other issues..." Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen told reporters on Wednesday.

Bangladesh has a number of issues to discuss with Lu, while the US too has some expectations, he said, adding, "We hope to frankly discuss those."

The US is Bangladesh's single largest destination for readymade garments. It is also the largest donor for humanitarian assistance for the Rohingya refugees.

The US also wants to boost defence and maritime cooperation with Bangladesh.

Bangladesh wants the US to withdraw the sanctions on Rab, reinstate the GSP facility for apparel import and make more investments in infrastructure, renewable energy, and help mitigate climate change fallout.

"The big powers want to have deeper engagement with us. If we can

remain engaged, it is good for us," Secretary Momen said.

Asked if Bangladesh is joining the US-led IPS, he said the US, Canada, the EU and Japan have their strategy on the Indo-Pacific.

"We will also have our own strategy on how we want to see our Bay of Bengal and beyond."

China operates first domestic Boeing 737 MAX flight since 2019

AFP, *BEIJING*

A Boeing 737 MAX took off from southern China yesterday, the first domestic flight using the aircraft model since March 2019 when it was grounded after two deadly crashes.

The resumption of flights is a boost for the American manufacturer in one of its most important markets. China was among the first countries to ground the plane after two fatal accidents involving its flight control software in 2018 and 2019, and was the last major Boeing market to rescind the ban.