



YOUR RIGHT
TO KNOW

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"The Taliban cannot expect the respect and support of the international community until they respect the human rights of all Afghans."

US Secretary of State
Antony Blinken



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Graft is his middle name

Internal GCC enquiry upon directive of LGRD ministry exposes countless misdeeds of suspended mayor Zahangir Alam

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE and MOHAMMAD JAMIL KHAN

He and his cronies spared nothing. Not even the funds meant for feeding the destitute on National Mourning Day.

Their hands reached into every cookie jar in Gazipur City Corporation. Mohammad Zahangir Alam, the suspended Gazipur mayor, and associates left imprints of corruption everywhere – from major public operations like distribution of GCC grants, sand-filling, widening of roads and cleaning of sewer lines to small-scale activities like catering for the devotees at Biswa Jtama.

They did not sit out even when it came to the money earmarked for the celebration of Bangabandhu's birth centenary.

Myriad corruption allegations against Zahangir were meticulously detailed in an internal enquiry report of the GCC.

A probe committee, formed by the LGRD and cooperatives ministry, had the GCC prepare the report, which included observations alongside the findings. The Daily Star has the documents that were submitted to the ministry.

Gazipur City Corporation spent Tk 12.43 crore for clearing garbage in eight areas over three fiscal years: (2018-2019, 2019-2020 and 2020-2021).

The bills were paid without any garbage being cleared in those areas. The GCC investigation report chronicles how all laws were disregarded and corruption became all-encompassing on his watch.

Zahangir, also the expelled general secretary of the Gazipur city Awami League, hogged headlines again after the ruling party granted him amnesty on January 21 following a mercy petition.

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Tk 1.79cr not enough to buy a broom!

MS Shiuli Enterprise was paid Tk 1.79 crore for unclogging the drains in Kashimpur (Area-8), but the money was seemingly insufficient as nothing, not even a single broom, was bought.

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Even devotees' food not spared

Tens of thousands of Muslim devotees from home and abroad gather on the banks of the Turag every year for Bishwa Jtama, the second largest Islamic congregation.

The devotees need food and water as they stay there for three straight

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Tk 2.60cr into thin air

A bank account was opened in the name of ex-mayor Zahangir Alam, and was later used for the transaction of Gazipur City Corporation's money.

The account was opened with Premier Bank LTD's Konabari branch on February 25, 2020.

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Underground metro another milestone

Says PM at inauguration of MRT Line-1 construction

UNB, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday inaugurated the construction of the country's first-ever underground metro rail, hailing it as another milestone in Bangladesh's journey towards progress.

"We've set another milestone in Bangladesh's development journey by opening the construction work of the underground metro rail today [Thursday]," she said.

The premier made the remarks while addressing a rally at Purbachal in Narayanganj's Rupganj, where she unveiled the inaugural plaque of the construction work of the 31.241-km MRT Line-1.

The MRT Line-1 having both underground and elevated facilities will be constructed at an estimated cost of Tk 52,561.43 crore by 2026.

The 20km Airport-Kamalapur part

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Govt commits to 20 IMF conditions

First tranche of \$476.27m in BB vault now

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

The International Monetary Fund has laid out 20 conditions for Bangladesh for its \$4.7 billion loan programme aimed at restoring macroeconomic stability, accelerating overdue macroeconomic reforms and tackling climate change challenges.

Of the 20 conditions, two are quantitative performance criteria (QPCs), which are specific, measurable targets that must be met.

Four of the conditions are indicative targets (ITs), which are similar to QPCs in that those are quantitative indicators to assess progress in meeting a programme's objectives.

For Bangladesh, the QPCs are a floor on net international reserves (NIR) and a ceiling of 3.3 percent of GDP on budget deficit.

The ITs are: ceiling on reserve money and floors on tax revenue, priority social spending that comprises all

expenditures on education, health, and social safety nets and capital investment that comprises all Annual Development Programme (ADP) expenditures in the budget.

As per the QPC set for June and December, Bangladesh's NIR cannot be below \$22.9 billion in March, \$24.5 billion in June, \$25.3 billion in September and \$26.8 billion in December.

"A modest buildup in NIR, as a QPC (floor), is targeted in the first year of the programme, with further increases programmed over the medium term, to cover four months of prospective imports. Greater exchange rate flexibility will help accumulate reserves, strengthen external buffers, and build resilience," said the staff report prepared for the executive board's consideration.

For program monitoring purposes, the NIR is defined as gross international reserves minus reserve-related liabilities.

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B'BARIA BY-POLLS 'Missing' candidate reappears

He went into hiding to avoid 'pressure'

OUR CORRESPONDENT,
Brahmanbaria

Former BNP leader and a candidate in Brahmanbaria-2 by-polls, Abu Asif Ahmed, who was missing for six days before and during the election, reappeared yesterday and claimed that he went into hiding of his own accord.

"As the election came nearer, I felt a lot of pressure ... I couldn't bear it. That is why I went away. I came back once the election was over," he told The Daily Star at his home in Brahmanbaria's Ashuganj upazila around 6:45pm yesterday – three hours after he reappeared – in the presence of his wife Meherunnesa Meherun.

Asked about the pressure he was facing, he would not comment.

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Govt seeks revision of deal with Adani Power

Delhi says it is not involved

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government has sought to revise its power purchase agreement with Adani Power in light of the skyrocketing price of coal.

The development was confirmed by multiple officials of the Bangladesh Power Development Board (PDB), who insisted on anonymity due to the sensitivity of the matter.

The power purchase agreement signed with Adani in November 2017 stipulates that Bangladesh will pay the market price for coal that would be used to fire the power plant in Jharkhand, India, reports The Washington Post, which got three industry experts to review the confidential 163-page agreement.

Other agreements with foreign power suppliers, also seen by The Post, include clauses that would put a cap on the prices Bangladesh pays if the cost of coal skyrockets.

In December last year, the price per metric tonne of Australian coal was \$379.2 on average, according to the World Bank commodity price data of January. In 2020, it was \$60.8.

The coal for the power plant will probably be supplied by Adani's Carmichael mine in Australia, The Post said.

"Industry analysts say the coal will probably come on Adani ships to an Adani-owned port in eastern India, then arrive at the plant on a stretch of Adani-built rail. The electricity generated will be sent to the border over an Adani-built high-voltage line. Under the contract, shipping and transmission costs will be passed on to Bangladesh," the report added.

The request for the review of the power purchase agreement came after Adani Power sent a request to PDB, which would be buying all the power generated by the plant, to issue a demand note that it can present to Indian authorities to open letters of credit for the coal import.

In the letter, the coal price was quoted at \$400 per metric tonne,

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SIX BY-ELECTIONS

Public apathy to blame for low turnout

Say experts

MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The turnout of 16 percent voters on Wednesday's by-polls to Brahmanbaria-2 was the lowest in any by-election held in the last four years, excluding the ones held amid coronavirus restrictions.

Turnouts for Bogura-4 and -6, Chapainawabganj-2 and -3 by-polls held the same day were among the lowest, according to Election Commission (EC) data.

However, voter turnout in Thakurgaon-3 was one of the highest since the 11th national polls held on December 30, 2018.

Experts blame the absence of participatory and competitive elections and the erosion of people's trust in the EC because of its failure to hold the last two general elections in a free and fair manner for the people's apparent nonchalance towards voting.

However, the EC officials said BNP's absence in the elections and the lack of an Awami League candidate in three constituencies were the reasons why voter turnout was low. Besides, people are aware that the individuals elected in the by-polls will get to be lawmakers for less than a year.

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Cement factory workers handling bags of imported cement after unloading them from a ship in the port city's Sadarghat area yesterday. Working with cement means coming into physical contact with raw materials such as clinker, gypsum, limestone and fly ash – all of which are harmful for the human body and may lead to different kinds of chronic diseases. However, due to lack of awareness among the workers and the negligence of the authorities concerned, the people end up working with no safety gear or any other kind of precaution that may help shield them from the harmful material.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

PVT HAJJ PACKAGE

Cost goes up by Tk 1.5 lakh

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cost of performing hajj this year under a private agency will be at least Tk 6.72 lakh, about Tk 1.5 lakh more than the minimum cost last year.

Besides, a pilgrim will have to pay an additional sum to the Islamic Development Bank in Saudi Arabia for a sacrificial animal, said the Hajj Agencies Association of Bangladesh (HAAB), which has around 1,500 members.

This year, 1,27,198 people will get to perform Hajj from Bangladesh.

Around 15,000 of them will perform hajj under the government management and the rest under private management, the association told a press conference.

The cost of pilgrimage under the government management reached Tk 6.83 lakh this year, the religious affairs ministry announced earlier.

Announcing the hajj packages yesterday, HAAB President M Shahadat Hossain Taslim said every pilgrim taking the base package will be accommodated at a maximum distance of 1.5km from the boundary of the outer premises of the Holy Haram Sharif.

Any additional fees imposed by the Saudi Government will be paid by the pilgrim, he said.

Hajj agents will be able to announce special packages on their own, but the

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