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## B777 LEASE CASE

# 21 Biman officials surrender before court

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Twenty-one former and present Biman officials surrendered before a Dhaka court and sought bail in a corruption case involving Tk 1,161 crore.

Judge Md Asaduzzaman of Dhaka Metropolitan Senior Special Judge's Court fixed May 8 for hearing the bail petitions submitted by the accused through their lawyers.

In the order, the judge said all the accused would be free until that time, said ACC Assistant Director (prosecution) Aminul Islam.

Two other accused in the case did not surrender.

On February 8, the High Court refused to grant them bail after they surrendered before the court and sought anticipatory bail in the case.

The HC also ordered the accused to surrender before the lower court concerned within three weeks in

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Agitating city dwellers in Chattogram protesting in Kadamtali area demanding cancellation of a recent hike in holding tax yesterday. Story on page 5.

PHOTO: RAJIB RAIHAN

## Polls in 5 cities from May 23 to June 29

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The polls in Barishal, Gazipur, Khulna, Rajshahi, and Sylhet city corporations will be held between May 23 and June 29 using Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs), said the Election Commission yesterday.

The polls will be held in three phases, said Jahangir Alam, secretary to the Election Commission Secretariat, after a meeting of the election commissioners at the Nirbachan Bhaban in the capital's Agargaon.

The meeting was presided over by Chief Election Commissioner Kazi Habiburul Awal.

A top official of the commission said the EC was considering holding Gazipur city polls on May 25 in the first phase. The second and third phases of the polls will be held on June 10 and June 22.

Talking to journalists, Jahangir also said that the preliminary discussions on elections in Gazipur, Rajshahi, Sylhet, Barishal and Khulna were held at the commissioners' meeting.

The schedules would be announced in mid-April, he said.

EVMs will be used at all five city elections. Besides, the EC has plans to install CCTV cameras at voting centres, he said, adding that the final decision is yet to be made regarding the installation of the cameras.

The EC is legally obliged to hold an

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## 43KM SYLHET-SHEOLA ROAD

# Dual carriageway to boost regional links

TUHIN SHUBHRA ADHIKARY

The government is going to turn the 43km Sylhet to Sheola Land Port road into a dual carriageway to improve regional connectivity.

would reduce 30 minutes of travel time.

Bangladesh Land Port Authority has already developed a port at Sheola in Sylhet's Beanibazar. India has declared Sutarkandi in Karimganj of India's Assam province as integrated check post.



The Roads and Highways Department (RHD) has sent a project proposal to the Planning Commission to upgrade the road, which will have service lanes on both sides too.

It is to cost Tk 4,257 crore.

All meetings and necessary scrutiny at the Planning Commission and the Road Transport and Highways Division over the proposal have already been done and the proposal is expected to be placed before the meeting of Executive Committee of the National Economic Council soon, said RHD officials.

Syed Moinul Hasan, additional chief engineer (planning and maintenance wing) of RHD, told The Daily Star yesterday, "Development of the road will improve regional connectivity."

Once implemented by December 2027, it

Expansion of the highway will enhance cross-border trade and commerce. It would create a new scope for exporting commodities to India's "Seven Sisters," said RHD sources.

The Sylhet-Sheola highway is also a part of Bangladesh, China, India and Myanmar (BCIM) Economic Corridor, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Nepal (BBIN) corridor and SASEC corridor, they said.

It means, apart from India, economic contacts and communications will be strengthened with China, Myanmar, Nepal and Bhutan, said RHD officials.

Currently, the RHD is turning Dhaka-Sylhet-Tamabil highways into a four-lane ones under two separate projects. India's Meghalaya is

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## Rowangchhari, Ruma, Thanchi off limits to tourists again

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Bandarban

The local administration of Bandarban has once again placed an indefinite tourism ban in Ruma, Rowangchhari, and Thanchi upazilas citing security reasons.

The information was revealed in a public notice signed by Deputy Commissioner Yasmin Parvin Tibrizi yesterday evening.

The ban will come into effect from tomorrow. Tourists, however, will be able to travel to the other four upazilas of Bandarban, read the notice.

On October 17, last year, the local administration imposed a ban on tourists in Rowangchhari and Ruma upazilas.

The ban was extended to Thanchi and Alikadam upazilas and the ban was extended several times.

Although the tourist travel ban in Alikadam, Thanchi and Rowangchhari upazilas was lifted, the ban remained in Ruma since October.

On March 12, an army officer, Nazim Uddin, was killed and two other

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## HAJJ PACKAGE

# Slash airfare to Tk 1.5 lakh

## JS body asks Biman

RASHIDUL HASAN

Criticising Biman for fixing high airfare for hajj pilgrims this year, a parliamentary body yesterday asked the national flag carrier to cut it down to Tk 1.5 lakh from Tk 1.98 lakh.

The parliamentary standing committee on the religious affairs ministry made the recommendation following widespread criticism of high costs of hajj package.

Meanwhile, the High Court yesterday asked Attorney General AM Amin Uddin to talk with the authorities concerned on reducing the costs.

The HC bench of Justice KM Kamrul Kader and Justice Mohammad Ali said this while hearing a writ petition filed for reducing and re-fixing in seven days the costs within Tk 4 lakh for a pilgrim instead of Tk 6.83 lakh.

Ashraf-Uz-Zaman, a Supreme Court lawyer and chief coordinator of the Al-Quran Study Centre, sent the legal notice to the religious affairs ministry on March 6, saying he would take necessary steps against the ministry if it failed to re-fix the hajj expenses within seven days.

As the ministry concerned did not take any measures, the lawyer on March 12 filed the petition challenging the government decision of fixing Tk

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## ChatGPT gets more 'human' as AI wave continues

AFP, San Francisco

The company behind the ChatGPT app that churns out essays, poems or computing code on command released Tuesday a long-awaited update of its artificial intelligence (AI) technology that it said would be safer and more accurate than its predecessor.

GPT-4 has been widely awaited ever since ChatGPT burst onto the scene in late November, winning users with its capabilities that were based on an older version of OpenAI's technology, known as a large language model.

"We've created GPT-4, the latest milestone in OpenAI's effort in scaling up deep learning," a company blog said, adding that the AI technology "exhibits human-level performance" on some professional and academic tasks.

The company said the model is "more creative and collaborative than ever before" and would "solve difficult problems with greater accuracy" than its earlier versions.

With its update, text responses from GPT-4 will be more accurate, and – in future – will come from both image and text inputs in a major leap forward for the technology, though this aspect has not yet been released.

For example, if a user sends a picture of the

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## Pakistan police postpone arrest of Imran Khan

## PTI supporters celebrate; ex-PM alleges plot to bar him from polls

AGENCIES

A Pakistan court yesterday ordered police to suspend an operation to arrest former Prime Minister Imran Khan, bringing a halt to pitched battles in which police baton-charged supporters of the former cricketer and fired water cannon and tear gas.

Security forces withdrew from around his home in the eastern city of Lahore, easing political instability in the nuclear-armed nation which is struggling with an economic crisis and awaiting an International Monetary Fund bailout.

The Lahore High Court ordered police to postpone their efforts to arrest Khan until today, provincial information minister Amir Mir told Reuters.

The PTI had also petitioned the Islamabad High Court, seeking the cancellation of the non-bailable arrest warrant. The court dismissed the plea, asking Khan to submit an undertaking to a lower court that he would appear before it on March 18.

A senior police official said security forces had withdrawn to accommodate cricket's Pakistan Super League (PSL), the country's top sporting event, which is

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A supporter, left, of former prime minister Imran Khan stands near a burning vehicle during clashes with riot police near the Khan's house to prevent officers from arresting him, in Lahore, Pakistan yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

## KSA could invest in Iran 'very quickly'

## Says finance minister

AFP, Riyadh

Saudi Arabia could start making investments in Iran "very quickly" after they agreed to restore diplomatic ties, the Saudi Finance Minister Mohammed Al-Jadaan said yesterday, despite sweeping US sanctions against the Islamic republic.

Al-Jadaan said there were "a lot of opportunities" in Iran and that he couldn't see any reason to prevent investments taking place between the two Gulf heavyweights.

"I would say quickly," he told the Financial Sector Conference in Riyadh, when asked how soon Saudi Arabia could start making "significant" investments in Iran.

"When people really stick to the principles of what was agreed, I think that that could happen very quickly."

In a surprise, Chinese-brokered announcement on Friday, Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to work towards restoring ties and reopening diplomatic missions within two months.

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