

## Two schoolboys stabbed to death over feud with juniors

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Patuakhali

Two schoolboys were stabbed to death during a feud with their juniors in Patuakhali's Baulal around 4:00pm yesterday.

The victims are Nafis and Siam, grade-X students at Indrakul Secondary School, said Al Mamun, officer-in-charge of Baulal Police Station.

After their classes were over for the day yesterday, they headed towards home. On the way, they locked into a feud with some junior students, he said.

At one point, they were stabbed allegedly by some students of grade-IX. Hearing their hue and cry, locals rescued them and rushed to Baulal Upazila Health Complex. They were then referred to Sher-e-Bangla Medical College Hospital in Barishal as their conditions were critical, he added.

They breathed their last at the hospital around 7:30pm, he further said.

Police are trying their best to arrest the attackers, the police officer said.



A view shows a residential building damaged by a Russian missile strike, amid Russia's attack on Ukraine, in Zaporizhzhia, Ukraine yesterday.

PHOTO: REUTERS

## Hajj package cost cut by Tk 11,725

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday reduced the cost of hajj packages by Tk 11,725 after Saudi Arabia cut the service charges for pilgrims worldwide.

Pilgrims willing to perform hajj this year under government management will have to pay Tk 6,71,290 each, while those willing to perform the ritual under private management will have to spend Tk 6,60,893 each, said an emergency circular of the religious affairs ministry.

Meanwhile, the government has extended the deadline for hajj registration to March 27 from March 21.

Once the registration quota of 1.27 lakh is reached, the registration process will close automatically.

As of Tuesday, a total of 1,14,829

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

## US wants conditions conducive to fair polls

Peter Haas tells *The Daily Star*

PORIMOL PALMA

Bangladesh's relationship with US remains a robust one. Despite some strain after Washington's sanctions on Rab officials and Bangladesh not being invited to Biden's Democracy Summit, the engagement between Dhaka and Washington has been growing. What is the reason behind the world's leading superpower's rising interest?

US Ambassador Peter Haas shared his views during his visit to *The Daily Star* on March 19.

**The Daily Star (DS):** A series of recent visits by top US officials to Bangladesh shows Washington's renewed interest in this country. What attracts the US towards us?

**Haas:** I wouldn't characterise it as



SCAN THE QR CODE TO WATCH VIDEO

renewed interest, but as deep interest, which we couldn't display during the time of Covid. So, it's a re-engagement. There is a wide array of issues that we have to work on together. Whether it's questions of human rights, about business, security,

SEE PAGE 10 COL 1

## More economic pain to come Warns Sri Lanka's president after securing IMF bailout

AFP, Colombo

Sri Lanka's president yesterday warned of more economic pain to come for the crisis-hit nation, with strict austerity measures needed to restore its ruined finances after an IMF bailout deal.

The International Monetary Fund approved its long-delayed rescue package on Monday after China, the South Asian island's biggest bilateral lender, offered debt relief assurances.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe lauded the deal in a speech to parliament as a milestone in Sri Lanka's recovery from last year's unprecedented economic crisis.

But he also told lawmakers that the bailout was only the first step in more difficult structural reforms.

## Body found floating on the Shitalakkhya

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

The body of a 30-year-old woman was found floating on the Shitalakkhya in Narayanganj's Siddhirganj yesterday morning.

The dead could not be identified as of 3:00pm. On information, police went to Swashan Ghat area and recovered the body around 10:00am, said Humayun Kabir, sub-inspector of Siddhirganj Police Station.

"We are assuming that the woman breathed her last more than 48 hours ago. The body was decomposed," said Inspector Mizanur Rahman, in-charge of Kanchpur River Police Station.

## Farmer killed in lightning strike

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Mymensingh

A farmer was killed in lightning strike in Netrakona's Kalmakanda yesterday morning. The victim is Yunus Ali, 52, of Goypur village, said police.

Yunus was hit by lightning while working at his boro field at Mohishasura haor around 9:00am, said Abul Kalam, officer-in-charge of Kalmakanda Police Station.

Locals rushed him to Kalmakanda Upazila Health Complex where doctors declared him dead, he added, quoting locals.

The body was handed over to family members, he further said.

## Advance train tickets to go on sale from April 7

STAR REPORT

Bangladesh Railway will sell advance train tickets from April 7 ahead of the Eid-ul-Fitr.

Railways Minister Nurul Islam Sujan revealed the information at a press conference yesterday.

On April 7, BR will sell tickets for April 17. Tickets for April 18, 19, 20 and 21 will be sold out on April 8, 9, 10 and 11 respectively.

## UK launches Afghan unlawful killings inquiry

AFP, London

The UK yesterday launched an independent judge-led inquiry into alleged unlawful killings by members of the armed forces in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2013.

The inquiry will look at a number of detention operations and how allegations of wrongdoing were investigated by military police, in particular whether there were any cover-ups.

## Decent meal a luxury this Ramadan

FROM PAGE 1

"Last year, the situation was not so bad. But this year, the prices of essentials have gone beyond our reach," she said.

Every year, the prices of essentials invariably rise ahead of Ramadan. But this time, the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on the market is making it worse.

Importing and shipping now cost more while the taka lost more than 22 percent of its value against the dollar. The prices of almost all food and non-food items have increased over the last year.

In February, food inflation was 8.13 percent and non-food inflation was 9.82 percent, according to the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. A year earlier, the food inflation was 6.22 percent and non-food inflation 6.10 percent.

According to the Trading

Corporation of Bangladesh, sugar was Tk 80 a kg just before Ramadan last year; now it's Tk 115 to Tk 120. The price of chickpeas rose from Tk 70 to Tk 85-90 a kg and lentils from Tk 95-100 to Tk 135-140.

The price of dates rose by 26 percent, eggs by 24.32 percent, broiler chicken by 62.5 percent and beef by 8.89 percent.

"You cannot name a single product that doesn't cost more. You will not get any vegetable other than green papaya for less than Tk 50. How will people survive?" said Masud Reza, a resident of Mohammadpur.

The price of aubergine drastically increased over the last week: each kg now costs Tk 100-120 depending on the variety, up from Tk 60-80.

The aubergine prices went up because the demand shot up ahead of Ramadan, said vegetable sellers in Karwan Bazar, one of the largest

wholesale markets in Dhaka.

A kg of beef now costs Tk 750-800 and mutton Tk 1,100-1,150.

People are now buying less compared to previous years because of the significant reduction in their purchasing power due to inflation, according to the sellers.

"Compared to last Ramadan, my sales have halved," said Babul Mia, owner of Amin General Store at Karwan Bazar.

Some people said they were spending their savings to make ends meet.

Abu Hanif, a fish seller in Kathalbagan, said he earlier saved Tk 2,000 for Ramadan and spent the money yesterday to buy broiler chicken, fish, onion, potato and palm oil from Karwan Bazar.

"Had I not saved, it would have been difficult for me to buy these," he said.

## 3 laws there

FROM PAGE 1

But fair price remains a distant reality in the country, said Mosammat Nazmanara Khanum, former secretary of the food ministry.

"It's like a cat and mouse game. When the prices of essentials shoot up on different occasions, drives are carried out. Those only bring some temporary relief, but the problem persists," she said.

Consumers have been struggling to cope with the price volatility for about two years. The situation worsened in the last six months after the overall inflation rate hit 9.5 percent in August last year, the highest in 12 years.

The food inflation also increased during this period because of the economic crisis stemming from the Russia-Ukraine war and the Covid-19 pandemic.

**LAWS THERE, BUT ENFORCEMENT LAX**

The Section 19 of the Agricultural Marketing Act says that a person will be sentenced to a maximum of one year in prison or fined Tk 1 lakh or both for creating an artificial crisis of farm produce, agricultural ingredients and essential goods and making an more profit than that fixed by the government.

Creating obstructions to the transportation of agricultural goods, cheating in weighing, not displaying both wholesale and retail prices at visible places, and failing to supply goods from stocks as per the government's directives during a crisis period are also punishable offence as per the law.

For similar offences, the Consumers Right Protection Act and the Control of Essential Commodities Act have stipulated different punishments.

The food ministry is working on amending the Control of Essential Commodities Act to incorporate in it a provision for capital punishment for hoarding, said officials.

"There are many laws in our country but the problem lies in their implementation," said Mohammad Yusuf, a former director general of DAM.

Of the three government organisations, the DAM works closely with farmers for marketing of agricultural products.

Last year, the department fixed the profit margins for retailers of essentials after a meeting with the stakeholders. But there was no visible monitoring afterwards.

"It is possible to find out the actual cost of a product and set the

tentative prices for the producer, wholesaler, and retailer. Such fixation of prices and their disclosures create transparency and make consumers aware. Only then, proper monitoring of prices will be possible," said Yusuf.

He said a strong political commitment is needed to do so. "But the interest of the businesspeople gets priority in our country."

The former DAM chief said one single organisation should be tasked with market monitoring.

Food ministry Secretary Ismiel Hossain said his ministry mainly looks after the prices of rice and wheat while the agriculture ministry monitors the prices of agricultural products and commerce ministry keep a watch on the prices of other essentials.

He claimed that there is no lack of coordination between the three organisations as the Cabinet Division oversees the matter.

Omar Md Imrul Mohsin, DG of DAM, said though the Agricultural Marketing Act allows his department to punish market manipulators, it could not enforce the law properly due to lack of its magistracy power.

"We sought magistracy power, but we have been denied. We depend on others to conduct drives," he said.

AHM Shafiquzzaman, DG of the Directorate of National Consumers Right Protection, said the directorate carries out drives to check whether sellers charge people extra for commodities and create instability in the market.

Asked about the reason for high prices of chicken and beef despite drives, he asked this correspondent to talk to the livestock department.

SM Nazer Hossain, vice-president of the Consumer Association of Bangladesh, said the three departments were formed to ease consumers' sufferings, but they failed to do so.

He suggested setting up a consumer affairs ministry to look after the welfare of the consumers.

## Lawyer killed

FROM PAGE 14

getting off the Moghbazar-Mouchak flyover in front of Rushmono Specialised Hospital.

Anisul died on the spot.

Police seized the bus, said the cop, adding that the body was sent to Dhaka Medical College morgue for an autopsy.

Quoting Anisul's relatives, the SI said the victim was on the way to his sister's house at Sonalibagh from Dakshinkhan.

## Elite Paint

FROM PAGE 1

consignment and legal proceedings are under process, Mohammad Fyzur Rahman, commissioner of customs, told *The Daily Star*.

"I don't know anything about this. Those who are concerned with imports can speak on this matter. I am asking the concerned officer to contact you as soon as possible," Salim Ahmed, vice-chairman of Elite Paint and Chemical Industries.

Later, Mohammad Murad Hossain, who is the company's board secretary and head of the human resource department, contacted the correspondent.

He said the exporting company made a printing mistake and sent in a correction letter later.

"We will submit the letter to customs for clearing the goods."

When asked how the cans had Elite Paint's name and factory address and those looked similar to the company's packaging, he could not give any answer.

## Ready for talks

FROM PAGE 1

Meeting sources said the two sides had a detailed discussion on the election, election observers, the recently published annual human rights report by the US, and some other issues.

"They [US] said they want a free, fair and inclusive election. However, they don't favour any party," an AL source told *The Daily Star*.

The US side said they don't have an opinion about whether there should be a caretaker government or not during the election, slated to be held late this year or early next year.

"What the US wants is an election in which all political forces have equal rights," the source said.

"We told him our Election Commission and even the president invited the BNP for dialogue, but the party did not attend either, which shows its lack of sincerity."

He also said the AL delegation raised some observations regarding the US' annual human rights report, which said the 2018 national polls were neither free nor fair.

The report also mentioned the shrinking freedom of the press, abuse of the Digital Security Act, and enforce disappearances.

It added that only seven of the 22 Election Working Group NGOs were approved by the home ministry, NGO Affairs Bureau, and the Election Commission to observe the 2018 election.

"We said we don't allow the election observers when they are politically biased. We welcome neutral observers," the AL source added.

## Rabiul linked in every way

FROM PAGE 1

killed inside the flat but at that time he was not present there and "had no involvement in the murder".

**HOW IT ALL BEGAN**

In a confessional statement, Rabiul's wife Suriya Akhter Keya, another accused in the case, said he and his cohorts rented the flat to run a sex racket.

Wealthy men would be invited there on various occasions, such as birthday parties, and get tricked into posing for indecent photos, so they could be blackmailed later.

Keya was told by an aide that Rahmat Ullah, an engineer by profession, could be a potential target. She shared the information with Rabiul, who planned to bring him to the flat.

Being invited to a "birthday party", Rahmat asked his police inspector friend Mamun to join the gathering.

As Rahmat and Mamun reached Banani, Keya and two other girls of the gang took them to the flat.

As the two were sitting in a room, Rabiul's cohorts Swapan, Didar, Atik and Mizan came in and introduced themselves as law enforcement members and started to charge them for being there for "anti-social activities".

As Mamun identified himself as a police officer and challenged them, the four started beating the officer indiscriminately. They tied up his hands and gagged him. At one stage, Mamun fell unconscious.

Rabiul, who was then outside the building, left for his Aftabnagar residence around 10:00pm, and

around 12:00am, Swapan informed him that the police officer was no more.

To confirm the officer's death, Rabiul asked Swapan to cut a toe from Mamun's feet to see if blood gushed out from the wound. The body was dumped in a Gazipur bush and burnt the next day.

Rabiul also paid Tk 1,000 for refilling the car - in which the body was carried for dumping - at a gas station in the city's Khilkhet.

**PROBE AND TRIAL**

Police submitted a probe report before a Dhaka court in 2019 containing details of the murder.

According to the report and statements of the four accused, Rabiul took the police officer's motorcycle from the Banani flat and handed it over to Swapan to sell it.

As Swapan failed to find any customer for it, Rabiul asked him to leave the bike on the premises of Dhaka Medical College Hospital, from where it was later recovered.

On March 31, 2019, investigation officer Sheikh Mahbubur Rahman, an inspector of the Detective Branch of police, pressed charges against 10 people, including two minors.

On November 25, 2021, Additional Metropolitan Sessions Judge's Court-1 of Dhaka framed charges against eight people - Rabiul Islam, Rahmat Ullah, Swapan Sarker, Didar Pathan, Mizan Sheikh, Atik Hasan, Suraiya Akter Keya, and Sarowar Hossain.

Abdus Sattar Dulal, additional public prosecutor of the court, told *The Daily Star* yesterday, "We got a

letter from the High Court where we were asked to complete the trial of the case by one year."

The court set April 9 for the next hearing in the case.

In addition, the Juvenile Court-7 of Dhaka framed charges against two minor girls in the case on November 11, 2019.

Swapan, Didar, Mizan, and Atik in their statements said Rabiul "employed" them for the Banani flat to look after the sex racket and extort money.

Keya, who made her confessional statement to a magistrate after her arrest in connection with the murder, went into hiding after obtaining bail.

While Rabiul was never arrested, six others are behind bars.

Out of 38 prosecution witnesses, only complainant Jahangir Alam Khan testified before the court.

## Train hits bus

FROM PAGE 1

train was seen coming from Kamalapur. But the traffic congestion made it impossible for the bus to leave the tracks.

Witnesses said the train operator saw these and slowed it down.

After hitting the bus, the locomotive dragged it for around 100 feet before coming to a complete stop, blocking DIT Road and the rail lines.

Soon afterwards, the Dewanganj Express, which was going towards Kamalapur, had to stop at the level-crossing because of the bus.

The road and the tracks were cleared around 11:00pm.