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mark on
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Metro to run
from 8am-8pm
from May 31

"These agreements
matter for global
food security;
Ukrainian and
Russian products
feed the world."

UN chief Antonio Guterres
on extension of grain deal



AL only has election on its mind

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

With the national election drawing closer, the ruling Awami League's focus is on reorganising the party.

The BNP and other opposition parties' anti-government programmes are of little concern for the AL leadership now, insiders said.

AL leaders are working to bring discipline within the party so that it can participate in the election without rifts among local groups.

When the top AL leaders met AL President Sheikh Hasina at the Gono Bhaban on Wednesday, on the occasion of her "homecoming day", she directed them to resolve internal feuds and asked them to be prepared for making sacrifices, no matter how serious, for the party before the polls slated for next January.

Contacted, AL Joint General Secretary AFM Bahauddin Nasim said, "Our preparation for the next parliamentary polls is going on in full swing. We are concentrating on finalising our campaign strategy, working on our



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DAMAGE TO PLANES AT HSIA

Biman losing face, money

Experts say carrier's failure to
punish callous employees led
to series of aircraft collisions

RASHIDUL HASAN

A series of bizarre collisions involving planes on the apron of Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport have raised serious concerns about Biman's competence.

In the latest incident, a cargo loader of Biman gouges a large hole in the fuselage of a Boeing 737 of Fly Dubai on Monday.

A Biman employee was operating the equipment to unload cargo from the 737, sources at the HSIA said, adding that it appeared that the operator was being callous.

The plane has been grounded.

In November last year, ground service equipment hit and damaged a Boeing 787 of Bahrain's Gulf Air at the airport.

Not only does Biman's reputation suffer after these incidents, but the company also has to pay several crores of taka in damages after each of these incidents.

On April 10 last year, two Biman planes were damaged as a Boeing 777-300ER was towed into a Boeing 737-800 in a hangar, damaging the radome of the 777 and the horizontal stabiliser of the 737.

Only two months later, a Boeing 787 was towed into the wing of a

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RPO rules relaxed for loan defaulters

EC not getting powers to cancel results
of entire constituency

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday gave the final nod to the draft Representation of the People (amendment) Act 2023 with a provision that allows candidates to reschedule loans or bills they defaulted on a day prior to collecting nomination papers.

Experts say this will give loan defaulters more opportunities to run.

At the moment, potential candidates can reschedule default loans or bills seven days before collecting their nomination papers.

Former election commissioner Brig Gen (ret'd) M Shakhawat Hossain said, "A candidate who can reschedule loans a day before the collection of nomination paper must have the ability to do the same a month prior."

"It is not difficult to manage banks to reschedule default loans. It will not serve any purpose," he said.

While briefing reporters after the cabinet meeting, Cabinet Secretary Mahbub Hossain said, "As per a provision, the authority has been given [to the Election Commission] to postpone or cancel the result of one or more than one polling stations at any time during the election ... " The EC can cancel voting and the results, he said.

Responding to a question, he said the proposed law does not mention the cancellation

of an entire election.

Mahbub said, "Currently, one can appeal against the returning officer's decision to reject a nomination paper. In the proposed law, a provision has been incorporated for the right to appeal against any decision of the returning officer."

The draft sets a new deadline, 2030, for

**"A candidate who can
reschedule loans a day before
the collection of nomination
paper must have the ability to
do the same a month prior."**

Former election commissioner
Brig Gen (ret'd) M Shakhawat Hossain

political parties to have 33 percent women in leadership positions. The current deadline expired in 2020.

The cabinet yesterday also approved the Bangladesh Public Procurement Authority Act 2023 and the Secured Transaction (moveable property) Act 2023. It approved in principle the draft Bangladesh Trade and Tariff Commission (amendment) Act 2023.



A horde of people from the low-income group queued up near an OMS truck in Barishal city's Kaunia area, just to be able to buy three kgs of rice at Tk 90. With prices of essentials soaring with no end in sight, the desperation for subsidised rates too has been growing among the people. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: TITU DAS

ANTI-GOVT MOVEMENT

BNP looks to pick up tempo

MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

The BNP starts countrywide anti-government demonstrations today and it plans to make the final push in July.

In the first phase, the BNP will hold rallies in all 82 of its organisational districts to garner support and regain the momentum it lost after the December-10 rally in Dhaka, BNP insiders said.

The BNP has already announced rallies for most of its districts and city unites, they said, adding that their preparation for the final phase, which will be in July, begins today.

Its like-minded parties have also declared programmes in line with the BNP's protests. Before going for the second and final phase, the party plans to have meetings between top leadership and the grassroots to quell internal feuds.

BNP policymakers believe that they must go for the final phase as soon as possible since the government has started "arresting their leaders and filing false cases against them, something it had done before the last general election".

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THE THIRD VIEW

The middle income 'intellectual' trap

MAHFUZ ANAM

We have all heard about the middle income trap that many countries fall into while transitioning from one level of the economy to the next. Today, we want to talk about the middle income intellectual trap that, in our view, serves to create, among many other factors, the middle income trap and nurtures it for a long time. The intellectual trap refers to a country's policymakers' inability to ensure crucial intellectual freedom that accepts criticisms and divergent views, keeps an open mind for policy reforms, encourages innovations, and insists on transparency and accountability, which are the key factors in ensuring good governance.

The middle income trap -- and there are different types for different stages of economic development -- is a theoretical construct by economists to explain why countries going through various stages of their advancement get stuck and fail to move forward. For example, the Philippines, which is at our stage of development, is stuck in the lower middle income country (LMIC) trap for the last 34 years. It took Paraguay 28 years to make the transition from the LMIC to the upper middle income country (UMIC) status, which Bangladesh wants to achieve in 16 years (from 2015 to 2031), of which only eight years are left.

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5 CITY POLLS

Law enforcers for throttling internet speed

EC rules it out

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A section of law enforcers proposed throttling the internet speed during the upcoming polls to five city corporations at a meeting with the Election Commission yesterday.

The EC turned down the proposal, saying that it might backfire, said several sources, who attended the meeting, held at the EC office.

After the meeting, Election Commission Secretary Jahangir Alam said the law enforcers informed them that there is no possibility of any major sabotage or deterioration of law and order centring the polls, slated for May 25, June 12 and June 21.

Inspector General of Police Chowdhury Abdullah Al-Mamun said they would take necessary steps to control law and order.

He said the EC directed them to ensure an environment for free and

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Take steps to stop forex reserve slide

Economists also want measures
to combat runaway inflation

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A group of economists yesterday suggested the government and the Bangladesh Bank take time-befitting measures to stop the erosion of the foreign exchange reserves and tackle runaway inflation.

They also urged the central bank to withdraw the 9 percent interest rate cap on loans with a view to making funds costlier and giving a boost to the country's fight against higher consumer prices.

They came up with the recommendations at the closing session of the BIDS Almanac 2023 styled "Development Prospects and Challenges". The Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) organised the two-day event at the Lakeshore Hotel in the capital.

"As the forex reserves are on the decline, stakeholders think that the taka will depreciate further against the US dollar," said Ahsan H Mansur, executive director of the Policy Research Institute.

Owing to a higher level of import payments against moderate export and remittance receipts, the reserves declined to \$30.18 billion on May 17 from \$42.20 billion in the identical month last year, a decrease of 28 percent.

The US dollar traded at Tk 108 on May 17, up 23 percent year-on-year.

"The depreciation of the local currency has a direct link with the current high inflation as it fuels the prices of imported goods," said Mansur.

He pointed out that although food prices in the global market have decreased to a large extent, the prices in the local market have remained at an elevated level.

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