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### B1 Forex reserve falls below \$30b again



### P8 Politics at crossroads



### P7 40 aid workers killed in Myanmar since coup: UN



### P3 Dengue spreads to 57 districts

## US should first protect rights of its own people

### Says PM in JS

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Mentioning that people are being shot dead in the US every day, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday said America should protect the human rights of its own people first.



"Let them think first about how to save the people of their own country. That's what they should do," the premier told the Jatiya Sangsad in her concluding speech of the budget session.

Referring to the recent city corporation polls and parliamentary by-elections, Hasina said only the Awami League can hold free and fair elections in the country.

Blasting the US, the leader of the House said, "Many are being killed across the world. Even children are being shot dead in America every day. Killings are taking

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2



Tamim Iqbal could not hold back his tears, pausing mid-speech to gather himself, as he announced his retirement from international cricket during a press briefing at a hotel in Chattogram yesterday. Such a drastic step from the Bangladesh ODI skipper took everyone present in the briefing room, and later the entire nation, by surprise but the country's best opener did not take questions following his announcement.

PHOTO: FIROZ AHMED

## Yet another controversial law passes JS

### a2i bill goes through disregarding due process

MAHMUDUL HASAN

For the second time in two weeks, a bill was passed in the parliament that has taken its relevant industry stakeholders by surprise and is now facing a pushback.

The Agency to Innovate (A2i) Bill 2023, which was passed on Wednesday, empowers Aspire to Innovate (a2i), a special project of the ICT division to facilitate the government's Digital Bangladesh agenda, to form a company.

The subsidised state company would be able to participate in government tenders, run e-commerce, do IT consultancy and make software and hardware – a development that the promising ICT industry says would pose a threat to its very existence.

The industry stakeholders fear that all government projects, which is a healthy source of revenue for them, would be going for direct procurement of IT products and services with the view to patronising a2i instead of the existing practice of competitive tender.

Subsequently, from the moment the ICT division-drafted bill was passed by the cabinet in May last year, they have been opposing it. And the parliamentary standing committee on the ministry of posts, telecommunications & information technology, which has been tasked with scrutinising the bill, appears to have taken their grievances into account.

## BANGLADESH ECONOMY 'Nothing to fear, all is well now'

### Finance minister hails recovery from Russia-Ukraine war fallout

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The fear over Bangladesh's economy that began after Russia invaded Ukraine is now gone, said Finance Minister AHM Mustafa Kamal.

"Considering the global economy, we have to admit that what we achieved is much better than what the others did," Kamal said in response to reporters' questions after a meeting with Yamada Junichi, executive senior vice-president of Japan International Cooperation Agency (Jica), at the secretariat yesterday.

About the IMF loan, the finance minister said, "The loan we are taking out from the IMF equals to two months' remittances.

"We did not understand how long the war would continue. We were scared as the reserve was falling as well as the prices of goods in the world market were rising," he said on why the loan was taken.

"Now we have no fear. All is well now," he said.

About inflation, the finance minister said, "Now inflation is high all over the world. And when we came to power, inflation was 12.30 percent. But it did not increase.

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

## Why, and why now?

### Tamim retires from international cricket

AL-AMIN

Tamim Iqbal sent shockwaves throughout the sporting fraternity yesterday when the Bangladesh ODI captain announced his retirement from all forms of international cricket with immediate effect.

The best opening batter the country has ever produced, Tamim left all and sundry speechless at a hotel in the port city of Chattogram, where the left-hander abruptly drew curtains on a chequered 16-year

at least another couple of years left in him to serve the country? Why did Tamim, who was singularly focused on the coming ODI World Cup only a few months ago, take such a decision, which is damaging for him as well as for his country?

Tamim, at 34, is still no pushover as a batter. His healthy ODI average of 36.62 runs speaks volumes of his ability.

And his record as ODI captain is enviable to say the least. Under his stewardship, Bangladesh have won 60 per cent of their

**Why did Tamim, who was singularly focused on the coming ODI World Cup only a few months ago, take such a decision, which is damaging for him as well as for his country?**

international career during an emotional press briefing.

"Yesterday [Wednesday] against Afghanistan was my last international game. I am retiring from international cricket, effective right now," Tamim told reporters.

His decision to quit with the 50-over World Cup in India only three months away and Bangladesh possibly having their best line-up ever and a shot at a first-ever World Cup title led to some burning questions.

Why did Tamim decide to quit when he had

ODIs. After Mashrafe's retirement in 2020, Tamim took over as ODI captain. In his 37 games at the helm, Bangladesh won 21 games, losing 14.

At the press briefing, Tamim – wearing a black T-shirt and a baseball cap – did not elaborate on his sudden decision. He thanked everyone associated with cricket and wished the Tigers the best in the upcoming World Cup.

He did not field questions from

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

TO US, TAMIM IS STILL THE ODI CAPTAIN: PAPON – PAGE 11

## Emotional overdrive of final hours

MAZHAR UDDIN from Chattogram

As the members of the Bangladesh team returned to their rooms at the team hotel in Chattogram following defeat to Afghanistan in the first ODI on Wednesday, there were arguments, disappointment, agitation, anger and a lot of emotion flowing around in Tamim Iqbal's room till midnight.

It came as a big shock for those present in Tamim's room, including his elder brother Nafees Iqbal and a handful of his close friends, to whom the 34-year-old had first revealed his decision to retire from international cricket.

There were long phone conversations between Tamim and his wife in Dhaka, and it was learnt that the family members requested him to reconsider his decision.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

**"The parliamentary process of forming a law was not followed here," said Russell T Ahmed, president of BASIS, the trade body for software and IT-enabled services providers.**

But the version of the draft that eventually became the law does not reflect the committee's decisions, raising questions about the point of the exercise. There is no scope to change the decisions of the parliamentary standing committee.

On June 18, the committee comprising eight lawmakers sat in a meeting to scrutinise the bill, which was presented at the parliament on June 7 by Zunaid Ahmed Palak, the state minister for ICT. The committee was supposed to send a report to the parliament, which would then be reflected in the law.

Also invited to the meeting were the presidents of five ICT trade bodies: Bangladesh Association of Software and Information Services (BASIS), the Bangladesh Computer Samity, the e-Commerce Association of Bangladesh (eCab), the Internet Service Providers' Association of Bangladesh (ISPAB) and the Bangladesh Association of Call Centres and Outsourcing (Bacco).

"It was unanimously decided that a2i would not be allowed to form a company," Mustafa Jabbar, minister for telecommunications & information technology, told The Daily Star yesterday.

Jabbar attended the meeting at the invitation of the standing committee chairman AKM Rahmatullah.

"And the presidents of the trade bodies thanked the ICT state minister for accepting all of their demands including this," Jabbar added.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

## TALKS WITH US DELEGATES

## Polls, labour rights may figure high

DIPLMATIC CORRESPONDENT

The high-level US delegation visit, slated for July 11-14, may feature discussions on the upcoming election, human rights, labour, Rohingya and trade issues, according to foreign ministry officials.

Uzra Zeya, under secretary for civilian security, democracy, and human rights, will lead the delegation that also includes Donald Lu, US assistant secretary for South and Central Asia Bureau, and Anjali Kaur, USAID deputy assistant administrator.

At a press briefing at the foreign ministry yesterday, Foreign Secretary Masud Bin Momen said, "I have no such knowledge that the delegation's visit will be specifically to discuss election related issues. It [the visit] is a continuation of our engagement with the US, and election may be one of the issues to be discussed, along with those of human rights, labour, Rohingyas and trade."

He said the relationship between the US and Bangladesh has many different aspects. "We will discuss many issues. I am not ruling out the election. That may also come up."

Diplomatic sources said the next general election and labour rights issues

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5



The trial run of the metro rail on Agargaon-Motijheel route will start today. Commercial operation on this route is expected to begin in October. The Uttara-Agargaon section of the country's first metro rail, officially known as Mass Rapid Transit-6, opened to the public in December last year. The photo was taken near the High Court yesterday.

PHOTO: RASHED SHUMON

## US, EU politicians interfering in Bangladesh

### Says Russia

DIPLMATIC CORRESPONDENT

Russia has termed the letters issued by American and European politicians urging free and fair polls in Bangladesh "neocolonialism" and "blatant interference" in the internal affairs of the country.

"We have taken note of certain European and American politicians publishing letters calling for 'free and fair' elections in Bangladesh," according to a verified Twitter account of the Russian foreign ministry, which quoted its spokeswoman as saying.

"...This is #neocolonialism and yet another attempt at blatant interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state," it said yesterday.

The national election in Bangladesh is slated for January next year.

The statement comes when Bangladesh faces pressures ahead of the next parliamentary elections. The ruling Awami League and BNP are also at loggerheads over the polls-time government.

The US on May 24 announced visa restrictions on individuals and their immediate family members if they are responsible for, or complicit in, undermining the democratic election process in Bangladesh.

The US has been critical of the elections

SEE PAGE 2 COL 6