

B4

Inflation outpaces wage growth for 22nd straight month



P15

BFF extends contract with Cabrera



P8

Taylor Swift named Time person of the year



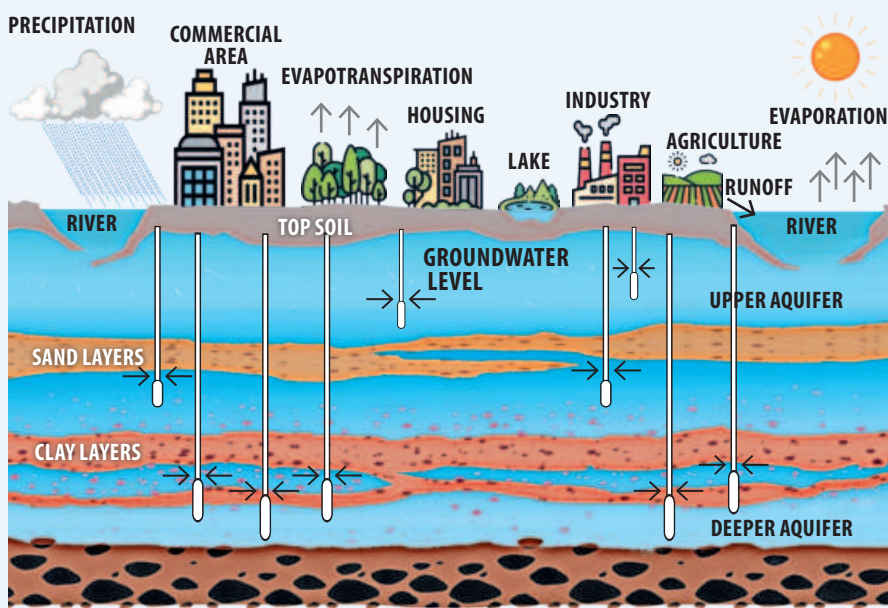
P5

In CHT, solar smile comes at a cost

Dhaka stares down the barrel of WATER

Rapidly falling groundwater level raises fear for freshwater crisis, land subsidence; geoscientists decry lack of scientific governance of water

NATURE'S WATER ECOSYSTEM



SYED ASHFAQUL HAQUE

Once widely abundant, the freshwater for Dhaka dwellers continues to deplete at a dramatic rate and may disappear far below the ground.

With rivers and waterbodies around the city either polluted or encroached upon, almost 70 percent of the water needed for quenching the thirst of Dhaka's 23 million people and supplying to homes and industries comes from groundwater.

Dhaka Wasa (Water & Sewage Authority) alone every day pumps out about 3.3 million cubic metres (m³) of groundwater, a volume that can fill up at least 20 cricket stadiums the size of the one in Mirpur. Shockingly, Dhaka Wasa during supply wastes five stadiums' worth of this precious water in system loss every day.

Reports of the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), which has been monitoring water quantity and quality for 60 years through a network of 1,272 observation wells across the country, indicate a jaw-dropping fall of 2 metres (7ft) a year in the groundwater level of Dhaka.

"A great disaster is taking shape under Dhaka," said Dr Anwar Zahid, a leading groundwater expert and BWDB director.

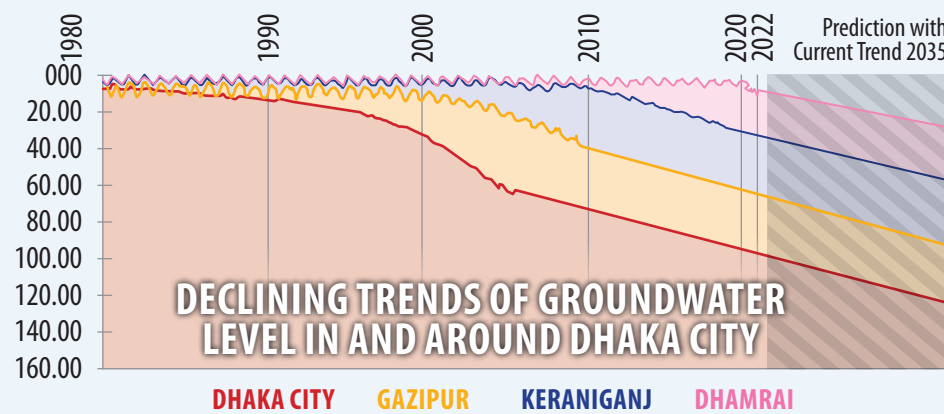
"We can't see it as it is happening underground. But we can make full sense of it looking at the historical data."

The drop rate of water level in Dhaka is eerily consistent with the forecasts made by the BWDB and researchers decades back:

from 25 metres in 1996, it dropped down to 45 metres in 2005, 60 metres in 2010, and 75 metres in 2023.

In the year 2050, it is likely to fall to 120 metres, with the demand, as projected by Wasa, ever-spiralling: 3.5 million cubic metres in 2025, 4.3 million in 2030 and 5.2 million in 2035.

Apart from the 1,000 Wasa pumps, 2,000



private and thousands other unauthorised deep tubewells are whirring all the time to drain the groundwater and meet the growing demand of the world's third most densely populated city after Mogadishu in Somalia and Tanta in Egypt.

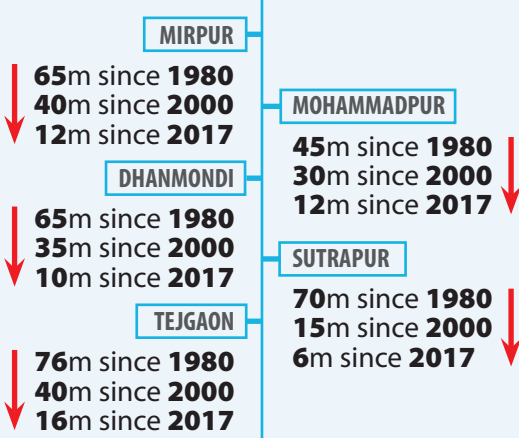
The demand for freshwater is rising exponentially as the capital is getting bigger and bigger to accommodate unplanned industrialisation and urbanisation on its

outskirts. According to the leading statistics database Statista, Dhaka (30,911 people per square km) is even more densely populated than the Rohingya refugee camp in Kutupalong (28,958 persons per square km). The impact of the uncontrolled overdraw from the groundwater reservoir, geologically known as an aquifer, is colossal and it is clearly reflected in the BWDB data.

GW USAGE

Drinking water: **97%**
Irrigation: **80%**
Industries & others: **100%**

GW DEPLETION RATE



(SOURCE: DWASA AND BWDB)

Reserves remain under pressure

Narrowing trade gap, current account surplus bring no respite

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MD MEHEDI HASAN

Pressure on the foreign exchange reserves remains high as the deficit in the financial account continues to widen despite the narrowing trade gap and a current account surplus.

At the end of October, the deficit in the financial account stood at \$3.96 billion, in contrast to \$1.27 billion a year earlier, as per the latest data from Bangladesh Bank.

The financial account is the component of the country's balance of payments that cover claims or liabilities to non-residents concerning financial assets. Its components include foreign direct investment, medium and long-term loans, trade credit, net aid flows, portfolio

investment and reserve assets.

Typically, a deficit in the financial account means more investments are flying out of the country than coming in and is a major factor behind the running down of foreign exchange reserves.

At the end of October, the country's gross reserves stood at around \$20.6 billion, down from \$27.5 billion a year earlier.

The country's dollar stockpile has shrunk further: as of November 29, which is the latest published data by the BB, reserves stood at \$19.40 billion.

Forex reserves would not decrease further in December because more than one billion dollars are expected from the International Monetary Fund and the Asian Development Bank, BB

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48-HR BLOCKADE

Arsonists torch 11 vehicles

Over 360 more BNP members detained, claims Rizvi

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

At least 11 vehicles were set on fire in arson attacks across the country, as BNP and its allies enforced the 10th round of blockades yesterday.

The 48-hour blockade of roads, rail and waterways, which began at 6:00am, will continue till 6:00am tomorrow.

The number of vehicles on highways yesterday was higher than during the previous blockades.

Visiting Mirpur-10, Bijoy Sarani, Bangla Motor, Nayapaltan, Sayedabad, Motijheel and some other areas in the capital, this correspondent saw buses and other public transport stuck in long tailbacks.

However, on long routes, only a limited number of buses left Gabtoli,

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POLITICAL VIOLENCE

38 BNP men jailed in cases filed 5yrs ago

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Thirty-eight leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organisations were sentenced to different jail terms yesterday in two cases filed more than five years ago over political violence in the capital.

They were convicted on charges of illegal gathering, arson, vandalism, assaulting police personnel and obstructing them from discharging their duties.

With this, at least 515 BNP-Jamaat leaders and activists have been jailed since November 7 this year in 25 cases filed between December 2012 and November 2018 over political violence in the city.

In a case filed with Kotwali Police Station in September 2018, 12 leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organisations were handed three years' rigorous imprisonment each by a Dhaka court yesterday.

The convicts are Anwarul Azim, Haider Ali Babla, Md Alaaddin, Md Shawkat Ali, Md Parvez Hossain, Imran Hossain Imu, Sayeed Ahmed Rana, Forhad Rana, Arif Hossain Bappi, Fazlul Haque Moni, Md Zakir Hossain, and Md Nazimuddin.

They are all ward-level leaders and activists of the BNP and its front organisations, says the case statement.

Dhaka Metropolitan Magistrate Md Syful Islam issued conviction warrants against the 12 convicts and directed the Kotwali Police Station OC to execute its order.

Five prosecution witnesses, including the complainant of the case, testified during the trial.

According to the case statement, a group of leaders

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New LC clause by US apparel buyer raises concern

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Garment factory owners are concerned as a US clothing retailer recently said it will not "process transactions involving any country, region, party" sanctioned by the UN, US, EU, or the UK.

It mentioned it in a Letter of Credit (LC) issued last month for an apparel exporter in Bangladesh.

Garment factory owners association BGMEA yesterday urged its members to "take the matter with utmost importance".

Those receiving LCs with such a clause should ask the retailer if they are mentioning this for Bangladeshi suppliers only, reads a statement issued by BGMEA President Faruque Hassan.

"If the clause appears only in the LCs issued in favour of Bangladeshi suppliers, then this violates ethics."

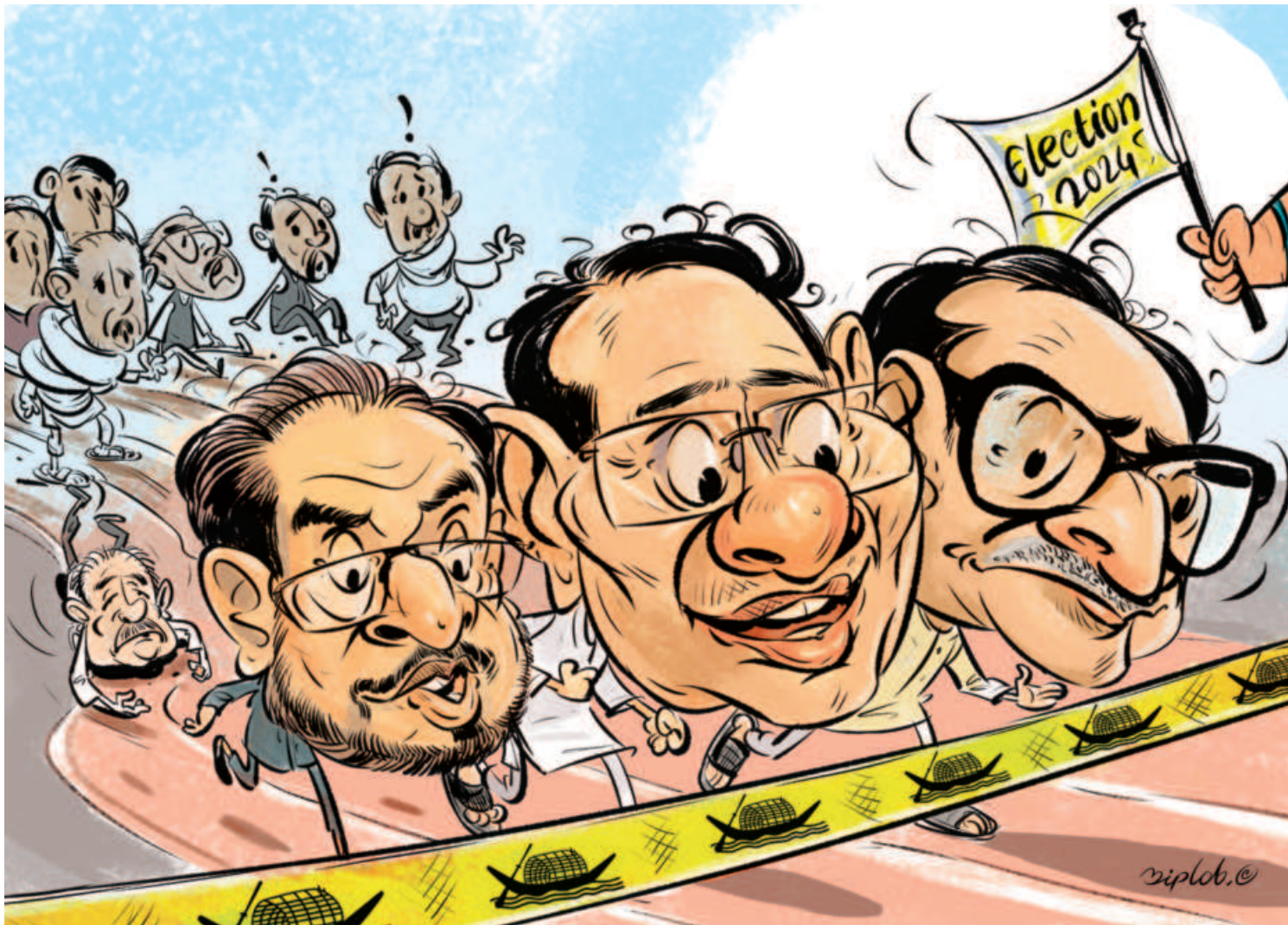
BGMEA members should reconsider doing business with such buyers, adds the statement.

However, the clause mentioned in the LC from one particular retailer should not be interpreted as a sanction of any form against Bangladesh, because this is not a statutory order or notice by a country, it says.

"Moreover, the BGMEA did not receive any information from our diplomatic missions or from any official source to support any sanction or trade measure."

The factory owner who received the LC from the US buyer notified the matter to the BGMEA earlier this week. Sources said the owner fears that such clauses may badly affect his business.

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JP seeks consensus with AL over seat-sharing

Party leaders meet AL team

RASHIDUL HASAN

The main opposition in parliament, Jatiya Party, last night requested the ruling Awami League to reach a consensus with them over seat-sharing for the January 7 polls.

A JP delegation made the request in a meeting with an AL team at a house in the capital's Gulshan, meeting sources told The Daily Star.

JP Secretary General Mujibul Haque Chunu and Senior Co-chairman Anisul Islam Mahmud and AL leaders Jahangir Kabir Nanak, AFM Bahauddin Nasim, Mahbul Alam Hani, and Mirza Azam were present.

Chunu refused to reveal the outcome of the meeting last night.

He, however, told The Daily Star he would

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