



Getting caught in 'easy money' scam



WHO chief warns pandemic accord hangs in the balance



The plight of incarcerated innocents



Misadventures in Middle East must stop

Curbs on fund repatriation irk foreign airlines

RASHIDUL HASAN

Many foreign airlines serving Bangladesh are not selling tickets to local travel agencies as they cannot take back most of their earnings from ticket sales due to the dollar crisis in the country.

Unable to repatriate profits, some carriers have opted to sell tickets to overseas online travel agencies (OTA) who in turn sell the tickets to local agents for profit.

This leads to a few problems. One is that the price of a ticket from local agents goes up hurting passengers, especially migrant workers, and the other is that it causes around 3,600 local travel agents to lose business fast, said aviation experts.

Amid dwindling foreign reserves, Bangladesh slowed carriers' profit repatriation. As of June last year, Bangladesh owed foreign carriers \$214 million, according to the International Air Transport Association (IATA).

Bangladesh's foreign currency reserves, as of January 17, is about \$20 billion.

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Nigeria was rated the worst.

An official of a foreign carrier preferring anonymity said, "The situation is easing but still terrible. We cannot remit our earnings properly. We switched to OTA so that we can remit profits."

An official of another carrier said, "We were able to buy dollars from banks before and remit our earnings through a designated bank but now the dollar crisis has blocked this path."

The official also said the delay in fund repatriation was costing them dearly as the taka lost 25 to 30 percent of its value quickly.

According to the Civil Aviation Authority of Bangladesh (CAAB), 32 foreign carriers operate around 160 flights to and from the Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport every day.

"If the situation doesn't improve, the air ticket business in Bangladesh, worth around Tk 40,000 crore, will go to the hands of overseas online travel agents," said Association of Travel Agents of Bangladesh (ATAB) Secretary General Abdus Salam Aref.

Prices of tickets on different routes, especially long-distance routes like New York, Canada, and London, have also gone up by \$50 to \$100, he said.

The government is losing revenue as the tickets are being sold abroad, he claimed.

ATAB President SN Manzur Murshed said people are having to buy tickets of higher tier as foreign airlines have stopped their system for selling low-fare tickets in Bangladesh.

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A washerman doing the laundry in the turbid water of the Buriganga in Kamrangirchar yesterday. Many laundries still depend on the river for washing clothes even though its water has turned black due to pollution.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

JP to play role of main opposition

Say 2 top AL, JP leaders

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Ending speculation about the Jatiyo Party's role in the new parliament, both Awami League General Secretary Obaidul Quader and JP Chairman GM Quader yesterday said the JP will be the main opposition in the House.

Speaking to reporters at the AL president's Dhanmondi office, Quader said, "Jatiyo Party will be the main opposition in parliament and the independent MPs will remain independents."

Asked whether the situation in parliament would be the AL versus the AL, he said, "They [Jatiyo Party] are a political party. Why would the situation turn into Awami League versus Awami League?"

Expressing similar views, JP Chairman GM Quader said his party will be the main opposition in the Jatiya Sangsad as it won the second most seats in the January 7 national polls.

Speaking to journalists in Rangpur yesterday, he said they were yet to receive any official letter from the parliament secretariat regarding the matter.

He said the JP will continue to raise its voice in parliament for the people like it did

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POLLS TO LOCAL BODIES 'Boat' now off-limits to AL leaders

Party decides this to quell infighting

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Awami League yesterday decided not to field party candidates in any local government polls as a measure to stop infighting between AL leaders.

The infighting worsened after the party decided to nominate candidates in the recently held national election and allowed their party colleagues to compete against them.

The new decision will be effective in the polls to Cumilla and Mymensingh city corporations, which are slated for March 9, said sources.

No candidates will get the party symbol "boat".

The decision was made at an emergency meeting of AL Central Working Committee, the highest decision-making body of the party, at the Gono Bhaban. AL President Sheikh Hasina chaired the meeting.

The ruling party convened the meeting to discuss the way out of the intra-party feuds.

As the BNP and some other parties boycotted the polls, the party adopted a strategy to make the election appear

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participatory and to increase turnout. This ultimately led to violence between AL leaders in many places.

According to insiders, at the beginning of the meeting, Hasina asked party leaders to come up with their recommendations on how to minimise the infighting and party's role in upcoming elections to upazila parishads, which will be held in phases. The polls are likely to begin in March.

AL Joint General Secretary AFM SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

PM calls task force to cut project waste

Task force summoned for the first time since 2015

REJAUL KARIM BYRON

For the first time in eight years, a high-powered committee will hold a meeting tomorrow with Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina to find ways to reduce waste in government projects.

The last time the high-powered planning commission convened was in 2015.

The meeting comes after PM Hasina at an informal meeting on January 13 at Tungipara asked her new cabinet not to take up unnecessary projects that drain funds, a priority for the newly-formed government.

"Before taking a project, carefully consider whether it is essential for the people," Hasina was quoted as saying by a minister.

At the same time, the projects that will benefit people should be given high priority, she said.

Hasina is expected to give directives to government officials to this end at tomorrow's meeting, which will also discuss six different agendas including

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Country sees Covid death for second straight day

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

For second consecutive days, Bangladesh yesterday reported another death from Covid-19 while the infection rate slightly dropped from Saturday and Sunday.

According to the Directorate General of Health Services, this is the fourth Covid-related death this month. Before January 11, the last death from the disease was recorded on September 13 last year.

With the new deaths, the number of fatalities rose to 29,481, taking the overall fatality rate to 1.44 percent.

DGHS data show that the patient who died yesterday was a female aged between 61 and 70. She was from Chattogram division.

In 24 hours till 8:00am yesterday, 30 new cases were logged and the infection rate was 5.14 percent. Eight more patients recovered during this period.

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Women on their way home amid dense fog after collecting firewood, mostly branches of trees, from a char in the Brahmaputra. People from low-income families are struggling to make ends meet as their income has shrunken due to bad weather. The photo was taken at Balashi Ghat in Gaibandha's Phulchari upazila on Sunday.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHABUJ

Some areas may see rain tomorrow

Cold spell to continue; all schools kept shut in Bogura, Natore

STAR REPORT

Dhaka dwellers experienced chilly weather yesterday as the mercury plunged to 12.1 degrees Celsius, the lowest in the capital this winter.

The country's lowest temperature, 8.8 degrees Celsius, was recorded in Badalgachi of Naogaon and Dinajpur yesterday.

Parts of Dhaka, Khulna, Barishal and Chattogram divisions may see rain tomorrow, said Monowar Hossain, a meteorologist of Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

According to the Dhaka Met office, the mild cold wave, which was sweeping over Rangpur and Rajshahi divisions and the districts of Jashore, Kushtia, Chuadanga, Tangail, Madaripur and Kishoreganj yesterday, may continue for a few more days.

People, particularly the children and elderly, have been suffering for the last few days due to biting cold. Cases of various cold-related diseases are on the rise due to the weather.

In light of the government's decision, all primary and secondary schools in Bogura and Natore were closed yesterday as the mercury dropped below 10 degrees Celsius in those districts.

Abdur Rahman, assistant meteorologist at the Bogura Met office, said the temperature in the district fell to 9.1 degrees Celsius yesterday morning, the lowest in Bogura this winter.

District Primary Education Officer Azaduzzaman Chowdhury said the schools were closed for yesterday

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