

## EMBEZZLEMENT Businessman sentenced to life term, fined Tk 100 crore

STAFF CORRESPONDENT, CTG

A Chattogram court has sentenced the owner of Muhib Steel and Ship Recycling Industry to life imprisonment and fined him Tk 100 crore for embezzling the money he borrowed from a bank for his business.

Judge Munsir Abdul Majid of Chattogram Special Judge's Court announced the verdict yesterday in the case filed by the Anti-Corruption Commission. Convict Mojibur Rahman Milon is now on the run.

According to the ACC case, Milon took out a loan of Tk 89 crore from the Laldighi branch of Agrani Bank against a letter of credit (LC) opened for the import of a 12,000-tonne ship for scrapping.

Although the businessman deposited only a fixed deposit receipt (FDR) of Tk 4 crore against the loan, the bank's management approved the loan in 2010.

**Although the businessman deposited only a fixed deposit receipt (FDR) of Tk 4 crore against the loan, the bank's management approved the loan in 2010. However, none of the bank's officials were charged in the case.**

However, none of the bank's officials were charged in the case.

ACC lawyer and public prosecutor Kazi Chanoar Ahmed told The Daily Star, "The ACC filed a case on September 14, 2021, making businessman Mojibur Rahman the sole defendant."

He said he did not know why no bank official was accused in the case.



A lorry stuck near the FDC intersection in the capital around 8:30am yesterday. Lanes of the street had not been paved after the asphalt was ripped up for the installation of underground cables.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

## Half a million Afghans return from Pakistan

Says IOM after Islamabad orders undocumented migrants to leave or face arrest

AFP, Kabul

More than 500,000 Afghans have fled Pakistan in the four months since Islamabad ordered undocumented migrants to leave or face arrest, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) said yesterday.

According to the latest figures reported by the UN migration agency, 500,200 Afghans left Pakistan between September 15, 2023 and January 13, 2024.

Most rushed to the border in the days leading up to a November 1 exit deadline Islamabad set for the 1.7 million Afghans it said were living illegally in Pakistan, and as police opened dozens of holding centres.

"Since the initial peak around November

1, the number of individuals crossing these official border points have consistently decreased but remains higher than pre-September 15th," an IOM statement said.

Pakistan defended the crackdown by pointing to security concerns in its regions bordering Afghanistan and pressure on its struggling economy.

"Some Afghans forced to return may be at risk of persecution, arbitrary arrest and detention and/or torture or ill-treatment," the UN's Afghan mission said in a report yesterday.

Meanwhile, the busiest border crossing between the two countries remained closed for the tenth day running in a dispute over document rules for commercial drivers.

## Iran foreign minister to visit Pakistan to rebuild ties

REUTERS, Islamabad

Pakistan said yesterday Iran's foreign minister will visit the country next week, signalling efforts to mend relations after the neighbours exchanged missile strikes last week at what they said were militant targets.

Ambassadors of both countries have also been asked to return to their posts by January 26, the Pakistani foreign ministry said in a statement. Iran's foreign ministry confirmed that Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian would visit on Monday, and said its ambassador would resume duties in Islamabad on Friday.

SEE PAGE 6 COL. 2

## PM calls task force

FROM PAGE 1

revising the manual for public sector development project formulation, processing and revision.

A major portion of government expenditure is on implementing development projects, said a planning ministry official.

Most of the development projects are invariably revised several times, causing implementation delays and cost overruns, he said.

According to a study by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, a month's extension in project duration leads to a 0.95 percentage-point increase in costs.

There are problems at every stage of government projects, from preparation to implementation, said Zahid Hussain, a former lead economist of the World Bank's Dhaka office.

It is essential to finalise the design during project preparation, he said, adding that procurement and work plans are also crucial.

"If a project is approved before these tasks are completed properly, there is bound to be delays at the implementation stage."

Also, government projects often see delays because of complexities in the tendering process, land acquisition and corruption, he said, while stressing on overcoming the problems.

The project implementation team has to be appointed in a way that officials are not replaced frequently.

## 'Boat' now off-limits

FROM PAGE 1

Bahauddin Nasim started first with his proposal for not providing party electoral symbol in local government elections.

He also recommended holding extended meetings in the districts where AL's internal feuds are intense and said the party should take all-out measures so that the infighting does not intensify further, said sources.

Almost all other party leaders echoed Nasim.

Some of them also suggested that the government take stern action against the arsonists to stop the recurrence of arson attacks, said sources.

At the one stage of the meeting, Hasina, also the prime minister, brought up the US presidential election and said the presidential election between George W Bush and Al Gore was questionable, said meeting insiders.

She said Donald Trump also did not recognise Joe Biden's victory.

Those who are preaching good elections to Bangladesh are mum on the issues of the US presidential

Besides, ministries have to be equipped with expert project selection teams so that projects are not taken on an ad-hoc basis, Zahid added.

The other agendas that will be discussed in the meeting include an analysis of the government investment situation and reviewing inconsistency between the Five-Year-Plan and annual development programme allocations, the planning ministry official said.

As the 8th Five-Year-Plan will end in this fiscal year and the planning ministry at present is working on formulating the 9th Five-Year-Plan, progress regarding the new plan's formulation will be discussed at the meeting.

Moreover, sector- or department-wise important issues will be discussed.

Usually, the government's key policymaking body, the National Economic Council, meets twice a year while the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council meets once a week.

On the other hand, the planning commission meets when emerging issues come to the fore.

The PM is the chair of the planning commission, the planning minister is its vice chair and the finance minister is its alternative chair.

Alongside ministers, secretaries and heads of different government institutions, planning commission members also attend the meeting.

election, Hasina said, according to meeting sources.

At the end of the meeting, AL chief Hasina decided to take "boat" out of the local government polls.

The AL started fielding candidates for the local body polls with its electoral symbol "boat" from 2015 after five laws related to union parishads, upazila parishads, municipalities and city corporations were amended, allowing party-backed candidates in local government bodies.

The meeting also assigned eight divisional committees to meet the leaders of the districts where there are intra-party feuds. It also decided to hold extended meetings there to resolve the problem.

While briefing reporters about the outcome of the meeting, AL General Secretary Obaidul Quader said the party would not allocate "boat" to any candidates in upazila parishad elections.

He, however, said the final decision would be made at a joint meeting of party's local government and parliamentary nomination boards.

## JP to play role

FROM PAGE 1

before. The party will also do constructive criticism of the government if it makes any wrong move, he added.

The ruling AL bagged 223 seats while the JP won only 11 in the January 7 election. However, independents, mostly ruling party leaders, won 62 seats.

The situation resembles the AL's victory in the first parliamentary polls on March 7, 1973.

The AL had then won 293 out of 300 seats and the opposition parties and the independents bagged the remaining seven.

The seven MPs had demanded that an opposition be formed but Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman disagreed. That's why there was no opposition party in the first parliament.

## Russia arrests 4 after rare protests

AFP, Moscow

Russia yesterday placed four men in pre-trial detention for taking part in rare protests that shook the Urals region of Bashkortostan, a republic with a large ethnic minority.

Thousands took to the streets of the small town of Baymak last week, and some clashed with riot police.

The protests were to support Fail Alsynov, an activist for the protection of the Bashkir language who was sentenced to four years in jail for "inciting hatred."

A court in the regional capital of Ufa ruled to keep the four men in detention until March 17.

"The Soviet district court chose a preventative measure for four participants in an unauthorised rally in the city of Baymak," said a court statement.

Three suspects -- Azat Mirzin, Dayan Valeyev and Rayat Davletbayev -- are accused of taking part in "mass riots" and using violence against law enforcement.

A fourth man, Vilyur Karachurin, was accused of only taking part in "mass riots".

Charges of organising or joining illegal demonstrations deemed by authorities to be riots carry a maximum penalty of up to 15 years in prison.

Rights group OVD-Info, which monitors arrests in Russia, said authorities have also opened dozens of lesser administrative cases, accusing demonstrators of joining unsanctioned rallies.

## Curbs on fund repatriation irk

FROM PAGE 1

He said a ticket to Bangkok is now about Tk 25,000 from any local travel agent whereas an OTA can sell the same ticket for Tk 20,000.

He said they have repeatedly requested the CAAB to address this issue.

Kazi Wahidul Alam, an aviation expert and editor of an aviation and tourism journal, said the crisis has been persisting for a long time.

"Bangladesh Bank is giving opportunities to some airlines to remit a portion of their earnings, which is not enough. That's why most airlines are not selling low-fare tickets in Bangladesh.

"As a result, Bangladeshi passengers and local travel agents are hurting," he said.

Wahidul said this is giving

Bangladesh a bad name. "Airlines interested in serving Bangladesh will feel discouraged."

The complaints of foreign airlines and aviation authorities are also embarrassing government officials and harming the country's image abroad.

For instance, the chiefs of civil aviation authorities and carriers of different countries met at the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) air service negotiation event in Riyadh in December.

There, they asked Air Vice Marshal M Mafidur Rahman, chairman of CAAB, when they would get their money stuck in Bangladesh.

"In front of everyone, they were asking our CAAB chief to release their blocked funds, which

tarnished our image," said a Bangladeshi official who attended the meeting.

Asked, the CAAB chief said, "As huge investments of different airlines are stuck in Bangladesh, chiefs of different airlines and heads of civil aviation authorities of different countries have requested me so we take measures to transfer their earnings to their own countries."

He said, "We have already requested Bangladesh Bank through the civil aviation ministry."

However, Mezbaul Haque, spokesperson for the central bank, told The Daily Star that he did not have any information that foreign airlines were unable to send their earnings back to their countries due to the dollar crisis.

## Some areas may see rain

FROM PAGE 1

following instructions from Bogura Deputy Commissioner Saiful Islam.

Natore Primary Education Officer Golam Nabi said the mercury dropped below 10 degrees Celsius in Ishwardi of Pabna and Rajshahi on Sunday night.

Therefore, the district primary and secondary education offices on Sunday night suspended all the classes for yesterday, he added.

Natore Deputy Commissioner Abu Naser Bhuiyan said the schools will remain closed today as well.

In Jashore, classes were held in schools yesterday although the temperature dropped to 9.8 degrees Celsius.

Ayub Hossain, father of a

schoolboy, said he had to take his child to the school yesterday braving chilly weather and the fog so that he does not miss any lessons.

Schools should be closed amid such a weather condition, he added.

Jashore Education Officer Mahfuzul Hossain said they came to know that the temperature in the district dropped below 10 degrees Celsius in the morning.

"We have informed the higher officials about the weather condition. We are yet to make any decision on closing schools," he said.

Jashore DC Abraul Hasan Majumder said the officials concerned will contact the Met office and make decisions on school closures.

## Country sees Covid death

FROM PAGE 1

The day before yesterday, 34 new cases were reported and the infection rate was 5.92 percent, while on Saturday, it was 5.83 percent. The overall positivity rate now stands at 13.09 percent.

In December 20, the rate was 0.66 percent.

According to the DGHS, the total number of confirmed cases is now 20,46,788. The number of recoveries is now 20,14,179, with the recovery rate of 98.41 percent.

Due to a sudden rise in infection rate from the beginning of this month, the government has decided

to administer Covid-19 vaccines again.

Advising people to use masks as a precaution at high-risk places such as hospitals or medical centres, DGHS in a press release yesterday said the new type of Covid-19 Jn.1 infection has increased in several countries around the world.

Amid this situation, the DGHS advised those who are at high risk to receive the fourth dose of the vaccine. It also asked people to do Covid-19 test before any surgery or treatment of any other disease if there are any signs or symptoms of Covid.

## COLD WAVE

## Primary schools to start an hour late

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The government yesterday changed the school hours for all government primary schools due to the ongoing cold wave.

Under the new schedule, all government primary schools will now start at 10:00am, according to a notification issued by the Ministry of Primary and Mass Education.

Earlier, schools started at 9:00am. This decision will remain in effect until January 31.

The previous order to close schools in districts where the temperature drops below 10°C will continue, the notification said.

## Robbery gang leader killed in mob beating

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Narayanganj

A suspected robbery gang leader was reportedly killed in a mob beating in Narayanganj's Siddhirganj yesterday.

The incident occurred in the Atigram area of the city's ward 4 around 2:30pm, said Abu Bakar Siddique, officer-in-charge of Siddhirganj Police Station.

The deceased Md Milon, 36, was accused in four cases, including one with robbery charges, said the OC, adding that he had a prior arrest record.

On Sunday night, locals apprehended two suspected robbers over the looting of a house in Atigram and handed them over to the police.

Nur Uddin Mia, a local ward councillor, said, "Those caught Sunday night were Milon's men. When Milon and his followers gathered in the area Monday [yesterday] afternoon following the arrest of his men, local residents caught and beat Milon."

Informed, police reached the spot and took Milon to Narayanganj General Hospital, where doctors declared him dead.

"The victim's body bore several injury marks from sharp weapons," said Mokhlesur Rahman, sub-inspector of Siddhirganj Police Station.

## 2 die under train wheels

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Jamalpur

Two young men died after being run over by a train in Jamalpur's Malandah upazila yesterday.

The deceased were identified as Mujibor, 18, and Shakil Miah, 19, of Rugnai village, said police.

Quoting locals, Mahbubur Rahman, officer-in-charge of Railway Police Station, said that the Dewanganj-bound Commuter Express ran the victims over in the Durmut area around 12:30pm.

Police recovered and sent the bodies to Jamalpur District Hospital morgue for autopsy.