



JMI to open Apollo Clinic in Dhaka



Tossing away BPL's charm



Iraq rebukes US over strikes on Iran-backed groups



Restoring Dhaka's lost past with 'Dhaka Gate'

PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION PM moves to contain cost, time overruns

REJAUL KARIM BYRON and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

A planning commission meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday after eight years took three vital decisions to ensure timely completion of projects and avoid cost overruns.

The decisions include forming a high-powered committee under the principal secretary to evaluate the foreign-funded projects, formation of a pool of project directors and a new system to select fresh projects.

At the meeting, Hasina called for ways in which the ongoing projects can be wrapped up fast and with little cost overruns to reap maximum economic benefits from them.

The development comes as planning commission data showed development projects in health and education sectors saw a staggering 13 percent and 27.5 percent cost overruns respectively in the last five years.

As much as 55 percent of the health ministry projects and 34 percent of the education ministry projects saw deadline extensions during the period.

On average, four project directors worked in the education sector projects and three in the health sector projects.



BNP leaders and activists from different districts waiting on the High Court premises in the capital yesterday for bail hearings in cases filed against them. PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

'Can't stay at home as cops hunt us all the time'

BNP ranks throng HC for bail

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Several hundred BNP leaders and activists from different districts crowded the Supreme Court premises yesterday to seek anticipatory bail in cases filed over political violence.

They have been on the run after the cases were filed against them on the charges of carrying out subversive activities centering around their party's grand rally in Dhaka on October 28.

Some of them shared their plight to The Daily Star; they described how they still could not stay at their homes for fear of police harassment.

"The rooftops of bathrooms, betel nut groves SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

KEY TAKEAWAYS from planning commission meeting

- Committee for evaluation of foreign-funded projects
- Formation of pool of project directors
- Committee for shortlisting dev projects
- Expand IMED activities to district level

The scenario is the same in the case of projects under the other ministries and divisions, said a planning commission official. "Projects in Bangladesh are rarely completed on time and within the original budget," he said.

At the meeting, the planning ministry placed several recommendations and the PM gave a total of 14 directives.

The directives include special attention to bringing down inflation, fast release of foreign loans, a guideline for the panel of project directors and training for project directors.

At the meeting, the planning ministry officials pointed out several challenges including taking up projects without feasibility studies, delays in land acquisition for infrastructure projects, shortage of skilled manpower for project implementation, absence of full-time project directors and lack of adequate skills on public procurement.

The meeting -- which was attended by Finance Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, planning commission members and top government officials of different ministries -- called for placing greater emphasis on feasibility studies as the quality of implementation of the projects depends on it.

"If the feasibility study is not done properly, it causes project delays and cost increases," Planning Minister Abdus Salam told reporters after the meeting held at the NEC auditorium of the Planning Commission.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Cold snap likely to linger for 2 more days

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The prevailing cold wave sweeping over Rangpur and Rajshahi divisions and some other parts of the country may continue for at least two more days.

The mild cold wave will continue until January 27 as the temperature will change very slightly during this period, said Kazi Jebunnesa, a meteorologist of Bangladesh Meteorological Department.

The mercury will rise slightly on January 28 and drop again for the remainder of the month, she added.

Light rain or drizzle is likely to occur at one or two places over Barishal and Chattogram divisions today, according to the BMD weather forecast. Weather may remain mainly dry with temporary partly cloudy sky elsewhere over the country.

Yesterday, the county's lowest temperature was recorded in Tetulia of Panchagarh at 8.4 degrees Celsius. In Dhaka, the day's lowest temperature was 12.4 degrees Celsius.

The prevailing mild cold wave was also sweeping over Dimla, Sayedpur and Rajarhat under Rangpur division; Rajshahi, Ishwardi, Bogura and Badalgachi under Rajshahi division;

SEE PAGE 6 COL 3

Winter chills bite farming hard

Boro, potato, veggie growers fear poor harvest

HELEMUL ALAM

Cold weather persisting for almost three weeks is harming paddy and potato farming in different districts while vegetable growers fear pest attacks amid foggy conditions will damage their produce.

At a time when prices of rice are rising and winter vegetables are staying costly, poor harvest will make food items even dearer later.

"Due to the cold and fog, the seedlings have turned yellowish, and nearly half of my seedbed for boro paddy is already damaged. If the weather stays like this for a few more days, the entire seedbed will be damaged," said Abed Ali, a farmer in Chilmari upazila of Kurigram, who has a seedbed on 20 decimals of land and plans to cultivate paddy in April and May.

Farmers preparing boro seedlings in Rajshahi, Dinajpur and Lalmonirhat expressed similar concerns.

Boro paddy, the main crop grown in the dry season, accounted for 53 percent of an estimated 3.90 crore tonnes of rice produced in the 2022-23 fiscal year, according to Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics.

In the current boro season, the agriculture ministry's target is to ensure production of 2.22 crore tonnes of rice. To reach the target, seedlings must be transplanted on 50 lakh

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ABED ALI
Farmer in Kurigram

hectares of land, officials said.

As of January 18, farmers transplanted the seedlings on 13 lakh hectares, according to the Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE).

Sazzadur Rahman, chief scientific officer (plant physiology) at Bangladesh Rice Research Institute, said when temperatures below 15 degrees Celsius persist for five consecutive days, plants cannot make their own food through photosynthesis, the leaves turn yellow, and the plants become weak.

Prof Parvez Anwar, who teaches Agronomy

SEE PAGE 2 COL 2

'SHARIFA'S TALE' Probe body to review content of textbook

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The education ministry yesterday formed a five-member probe committee to review "Sharifa's Tale" -- a content in the seventh-grade history and social science textbook.

"Sharifa's Tale" -- a part of the "Similarities and Differences Between People" chapter -- recently became a topic of discussion and debate after a part-time teacher at a private university criticised the inclusion of content, claiming that it promoted the "trans agenda".

An office order that the ministry released yesterday said the committee will review the content and make recommendations in this regard.

The move was taken following religious and social discourse, it said.

Headed by Prof Abdul Rashid, vice chancellor

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

the BUSINESS

BB plans more licences for digital banks

The Bangladesh Bank plans to offer more permissions for digital banks, building on the progress made by mobile financial services and internet banking in recent decades, in order to pave the way for full-fledged financial services based on a 100 percent branchless banking system.

In June, the BB issued a comprehensive guideline for setting up digital banks and received a huge response.

Fifty-two applications from around 500 companies, including banks and non-bank financial institutions, sought consent.

Of them, Nagad Digital Bank and Kori Digital Bank got the letters of intent (LoIs) in October.

STORY ON B1



As dense fog takes over the roads in Bogura due to the morning temperature going below 10 degrees Celsius for the last few days, vehicle drivers have to switch on their headlights for a clear view of the road ahead in order to avoid accidents. The photo was taken on the Bogura-Dhaka Highway in Shahajahnur upazila around 8:00am yesterday, when the temperature there was 9.8 degrees Celsius.

PHOTO: MOSTAFA SHOBUJ

All 74 aboard Russian plane killed in crash

65 of them Ukrainian POW; Moscow accuses Kyiv of shooting down the plane

REUTERS, Moscow

Russia yesterday accused Ukraine of deliberately shooting down a Russian military transport plane carrying 65 captured Ukrainian soldiers to a prisoner exchange in what it called a barbaric act of terrorism that had killed a total of 74 people.

The Russian defence ministry said six Russian crew members and three Russian soldiers had been on the Ilyushin Il-76 military transport plane shot down near the Russian city of Belgorod near the Ukrainian border.

"The Ukrainian leadership was well aware that, in accordance with established practice, Ukrainian servicemen would be transported by military transport aircraft to the Belgorod airfield today to be exchanged," a ministry statement said.

"According to an earlier agreement, this event was to take place in the afternoon at the Kolotilovka checkpoint on the Russian-Ukrainian border," it said.

"By committing this terrorist act, the Ukrainian leadership has showed its true face. It disregarded the lives of its own citizens."

Russia's foreign ministry called the shooting down "a barbaric act". Mykhailo Podolyak, a Ukrainian presidential adviser, told Reuters: "Time is needed to clarify all the data."

Video posted on the Telegram messaging app by Baza, a channel linked to Russian security services, and verified by Reuters, showed a large aircraft falling towards the ground near the village of Yablonovo in the Belgorod region and exploding in a vast fireball.

Ukraine's GUR military intelligence spokesperson Andriy Yusov told the Radio Svoboda outlet that a prisoner exchange had been planned for yesterday, adding: "It's not taking place at the moment."

Ukraine's defence ministry did not immediately reply to a Reuters

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5