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P11
Shamar's blast from the past



P10
Politics and Archaeology of AYODHYA



P8
Tackling the bad apples of police



P7
N Korea fires cruise missiles off east coast

Wait for Rohingya repatriation gets even longer

PORIMOL PALMA and MOHAMMAD AL-MASUM MOLLA

With the escalation of conflict in Myanmar, the possibility of Rohingya repatriation materialising anytime soon has become remote, heaping the challenges for the Bangladesh government in managing the displaced people in the face of shrinking humanitarian aid for them.

Since the biggest influx of Rohingyas from Myanmar's Rakhine State in August 2017, there have been three attempts to repatriate Rohingyas: once in 2018, once in 2019 and most recently in 2023.

All three attempts failed as the Rohingyas maintained that there was no guarantee of their safety and citizenship if they went back.

In May last year, a group of Rohingyas visited the Rakhine State for the first time after they fled the land to escape a military clampdown to see the ground reality. Myanmar officials spoke to the Rohingyas in person and verified their identities in the cases that had problems.

Then in July last year, Deng Xijun, the Chinese Special Envoy for Asian Affairs, visited Myanmar and discussed ways to repatriate the Rohingyas from Bangladesh.

Deng brokered an arrangement under which the Rohingyas would be allowed to live in their original villages and not in any camp. This was

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

BANGLADESH'S ROHINGYA CONUNDRUM

- Rohingya influx started in Aug'17
- 971,904 Rohingyas have arrived since
- 939,344 Rohingya population in Cox's bazar
- Repatriation attempts made in 2018, 2019, 2023
- Attempts were unsuccessful each time
- China brokering Rohingya repatriation
- Rohingya delegation visited Rakhine in May'23
- Bangladesh delegation visited Naypyidaw in Sep'23

SOURCE: UNHCR AND GOVERNMENT OF BANGLADESH



"It is not a good time for Rohingya repatriation."

Gwyn Lewis, UN Resident Coordinator in Bangladesh

"Beijing is working on a ceasefire in Myanmar's Rakhine state and that eventually will pave the way for Rohingya repatriation."

Yao Wen, Chinese Ambassador to Bangladesh



PM calls for global efforts

BSS, Dhaka

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina yesterday called upon the international community to take measures to repatriate Rohingyas to their homeland of Myanmar and ensure their dignified lives there.

"The world should think about how the Rohingya crisis can be resolved so that they can return to their homeland," she said.

The premier said this while a British cross-party

SEE PAGE 6 COL 6

JS devoid of 'true opposition' again

Convenes tomorrow; GM Quader leader of opposition

RASHIDUL HASAN and MOHIUDDIN ALAMGIR

The 12th parliament goes into its maiden session tomorrow in the absence of a "genuine opposition" that can hold the government accountable.

The Jatiyo Party, which appeared ever ready to toe the government line in the last two parliaments, is the main opposition for the third straight term.

Its lawmakers were elected in the seats that were not contested by the ruling Awami League.



Amid speculations regarding who will be the opposition leader, the parliament secretariat yesterday issued a gazette notification saying Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury recognised JP Chairman GM Quader as the leader of the opposition in parliament and Anisul Islam Mahmud as the deputy leader of the opposition.

The parliament will have no representation from major opposition BNP as the party boycotted this year's election after its demand for polls under a caretaker government was not met. Earlier, it boycotted the 2014 election for the same reason.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 1

The unbearable independence!

Independents vest Hasina with responsibility to pick MPs for reserved seats

PARTHA PRATIM BHATTACHARJEE

Almost all independent lawmakers do not want to be independents in the House and they claimed that the notion that they are not part of the Awami League bleeds their hearts.

They requested Leader of the House Sheikh Hasina to allow them to sit in the Treasury bench as they believe they are AL leaders first and lawmakers second.

In reply, Hasina asked them to play their role independently in the House and make constructive criticism of the government, said sources who were in a meeting between independent lawmakers and the prime minister at the Gono Bhaban last night.

Though the leader of the House directed the independents to play their role independently in the House, it is the ruling AL that will elect female lawmakers for the reserved seats – even the ones independents are supposed to elect. The five whips – all appointed from AL – will even act as whips for the independents, said sources.

In reply to the independents' request to be with the ruling party in the House, Hasina, also AL president, told them she belongs to all. She said the AL and independent MPs are like her right and left hands, said meeting sources.

"One is my A team and other is my B team," Hasina was quoted by an independent as saying.

There are 62 independents in the current parliament, and of them 57 are leaders of AL and its associate and front organisations.

As many major political parties, including BNP, decided not to participate in the January 7 polls, the AL chief allowed party leaders to run as independents to make the polls look participatory and to increase turnout.

SEE PAGE 7 COL 1

TEKNAF BORDER

Mortar shells, shots fired from Myanmar

BGB put on high alert

MOKAMMEL SHUVO, Cox's Bazar

Security has been beefed up along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border areas in Cox's Bazar as the ongoing conflict has intensified in Rakhine state on the other side of the fence.

Thirteen mortar shells and one bullet landed on the Bangladesh side during a clash between the Myanmar Army and the Arakan Army along the border on Saturday, said the 34 Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB) battalion in Cox's Bazar in a press release.

BGB immediately sent a letter to the Myanmar Border Guard Police (BGP) protesting the incident, read the press release signed by the Commanding Officer Lt Col Saiful Islam Chowdhury.

In light of the incident, BGB's Major General AKM Nazmul Hasan visited the border area where the mortar shells had fallen.

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

Rape victim abducted from Khulna hospital

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

Criminals abducted a rape victim yesterday when rights activists were waiting in front of the one-stop crisis centre of the Khulna Medical College Hospital to offer her legal support.

"Ten to 12 people were waiting in front of the crisis centre with a microbus. As soon as the rape victim came out around 5:00pm, she was forcibly put into the vehicle and whisked away. At that time, we were also beaten up," said Mominul Islam, the Khulna divisional coordinator for the Bangladesh Human Rights Implementation Organisation.

The woman had told her doctor at the crisis centre that Dumuria upazila Chairman Ejaz Ahmed raped her on Saturday night. She had also said that she wanted to file a case with a court, not with any police station since she did not trust the police, the doctor told The Daily Star.

Suman Roy, resident medical officer at the KMCH and coordinator of the crisis centre, told this correspondent that the victim went to the hospital on Saturday night.

"We handed her over to her family around 4:30pm today [Sunday]. The victim's mother and one of her brothers came to take her. Before this, we contacted the police. We were told by the Dumuria Police Station that no case had been filed in this connection."

SEE PAGE 2 COL 5

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MOMINUL ISLAM
Rights activists

BUSINESS

Monetary policy alone can't contain inflation: experts

The new monetary policy will not be enough to help Bangladesh rein in higher inflation as the central bank has come up with inadequate measures against huge expectations, experts said yesterday.

They also said the monetary policy alone can't help contain higher consumer prices, and supportive fiscal policy and proper market management are vital.

STORY ON B1



People crossing the busy road near Hazrat Shahjaha International Airport without using the footbridge just a few feet away. Such ignorant behaviour by pedestrians often results in road accidents. The photo was taken yesterday.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Govt institution, not workers, sued us

Says Prof Yunus after securing bail in labour law violation case; 3 Grameen Telecom directors also get bail

COURT CORRESPONDENT

Nobel Laureate Prof Muhammad Yunus yesterday said the workers of Grameen Telecom had not sued him and his three colleagues.

"The government is repeatedly saying, all levels of it are saying, that the case was not filed by the government. You are witnesses. But you are not saying anything. Did the workers do it? Or was it the government? Please give me the answer," Prof Yunus said, addressing reporters.

"It was done by the Department of Inspection for Factories, a government institution, not the workers. The workers are not in this," he added.

The chairman of Grameen Telecom said this after the Labour Appellate Tribunal granted bail to him and three directors of the company named Ashraful Hassan, Nurjahan Begum and M Shahjahan.

Chairman (acting) of the tribunal MA Awal also stayed

SEE PAGE 6 COL 1



"We are chasing a dream. We might have unintentionally offended someone by running after this dream."

Nobel Laureate
PROF MUHAMMAD YUNUS