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PREPAID GAS METER Rent doubles overnight

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The state-owned gas distribution companies doubled the prepaid meter rent to Tk 200 from Tk 100, putting more burden on consumers battling with the inflation and high prices of essentials.

The largest distributor, Titas Gas, increased the rent to Tk 100 from Tk 60 in July 2022.

Without any prior notice, the distributor hiked the rent to Tk 200 this month. The users who recharged their cards were charged Tk 100 more.

Md Hasanuzzaman, who lives in Mirpur, told The Daily Star that he usually recharges Tk 500 for a month. Of the amount, Tk 100 used to be deducted as meter rent. "But when I recharged this month, the money receipt showed that Tk 200 was the rent."

"I work at a private company with low salary. Already we are struggling with the inflated commodity prices, now the Titas has started charging us double," he said.

The users have taken to the social

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Makeshift shops have been set up on the pavement in front of Bangladesh Shishu Hospital and Institute in Dhaka's Sher-e-Bangla Nagar, causing difficulties for pedestrians and patients. Many are forced to risk walking on the street. The photo was taken yesterday afternoon.

PHOTO: PRABIR DAS

Law for speedy trial to be made permanent

Cabinet approves the draft

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The cabinet yesterday approved the draft Law and Order Disruption (Speedy Trial) (Amendment) Act 2024 to make the existing provisional law a permanent one.

Promulgated in 2002 by the then BNP-led government for a period of two years, the act deals with serious crimes like extortion, disruption of road, rail and waterways communications, vandalism of vehicles, mugging, creating terror among people, and tender manipulation.

The Awami League, the then opposition party, seriously opposed the law, calling it a "black law" that would be used to oppress the opposition activists. The party had walked out of parliament in protest.

The law, however, survived via six extensions despite changes in the government. It was last extended in 2019.

After yesterday's cabinet meeting chaired by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at her office, Cabinet Secretary Mahub Hossain said the Home Ministry's Public Security Division placed the proposed law before the cabinet, saying that this law has played an effective role in curbing crimes.

"The cabinet gave the approval to make the Law

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'RAPE, ABDUCTION' Woman shows up at police station, then disappears

Told cops she wasn't kidnapped

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Khulna

The "rape victim, who was abducted" from Khulna Medical College Hospital on Sunday afternoon, showed up at a police station and said she left the hospital on her own and was not forced.

Since then, she has been traceless. The Daily Star correspondent went to her home yesterday and her mother and grandmother said they had no knowledge about her whereabouts.

On Sunday, a brother of the woman told The Daily Star, "Ejaz Ahmed [Dumuria upazila chairman] took my sister to his office around 8:00pm on Saturday and raped her there."

She went to the one-stop crisis centre of the KMCH that night and was allegedly kidnapped as she walked out of the centre Sunday afternoon.

Rights activists, who witnessed the "kidnapping" and were beaten up by the "abductors" around 5:30pm on Sunday, yesterday said the woman might have been intimidated into saying such things to police, not filing any case, and disappearing.

About five hours after the woman was allegedly kidnapped, she

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Israel charges back into Gaza City

Residents say tanks shell eastern areas, boats fire at beachfront areas in west

AGENCIES

Israel launched an assault overnight on Gaza's main northern city weeks after pulling back from there, residents said yesterday, while heavy fighting has continued around hospitals in the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis.

Air strikes on neighbourhoods across Gaza City killed and wounded many people. While tanks shelled the eastern areas of the city, naval boats fired shells and gun rounds at the beachfront areas in the west, they said.

Israel said late last year that it had largely completed operations in northern Gaza. The push back into Gaza City, where residents reported fierce gun battles near the main Al-Shifa hospital, indicated that the offensive was not going to plan.

Among those killed were two Palestinian journalists, Essam El-lulu and Hussein Attalah, along with several members of their families, health officials and the journalist union said.

Gazans said the renewed violence made a mockery of a ruling by the World Court calling on Israel to do more to help civilians. Health officials said at least 26,637 Palestinians have



- Israel orders fresh evacuations of most populated areas in Gaza
- Hunger drives people to eat animal feed: UN
- Death toll in enclave now 26,637

been killed in the offensive with thousands more bodies likely under the rubble of destroyed buildings across the coastal territory.

"The war continues in a dirtier manner," said Gaza City resident Mustafa Ibrahim, a Palestinian human rights activist now displaced with his family in Rafah near the southern border with Egypt, along with more than a million other Gazans.

Israel ordered new evacuations of the most populated areas of the enclave, but people said communications blackouts meant many would miss them, reports Reuters.

Those that did flee, had to run the gauntlet of Israeli tanks placed on

residents said. People in the north have been grinding animal feed to make flour after flour, rice and sugar ran out, part of an aid crisis now exacerbated by a withdrawal of support for the United Nations' aid agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA.

Japan and Austria said yesterday they have decided to suspend additional funding to the UN agency. UNRWA said it would have to end operations within a month if funding was not restored.

Secys to sit with PM on February 5

BAHARAM KHAN

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina will have a meeting with the secretaries on February 5.

This will be her first meeting with the top officials of the civil service after she assumed office for the fourth consecutive term.

The last such meeting, called "Sachib Shabha", was held on November 27, 2022. Speaking to The Daily Star, several top officials said the PM has verbally agreed to attend the meeting.

The agenda will be finalised within a few days, sources at the secretariat said, adding that eight issues may be on the agenda.

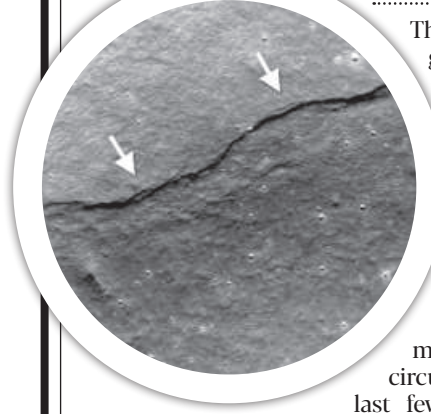
The role of the administration to keep the prices of essentials under control during Ramadan may be at the top of the agenda. Besides, law and order, the progress on implementation of the decisions of the previous meetings of the secretaries, and the cabinet meetings are likely to be discussed.

Requesting anonymity, a secretary who was involved in organising the meeting,

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Moon shrinking and crumbling

INDEPENDENT.CO.UK



The Moon is gradually shrinking, according to a new study, leading to a growing number of landslides that may threaten future astronauts.

The Earth's natural satellite has lost as much as 100m in circumference over the last few hundred million years as its core has cooled.

This may seem like a gradual process, but the shrinkage is causing significant surface warping in parts of the Moon's south pole - including areas proposed for Nasa's crewed Artemis III landings, researchers from the University of Maryland said.

Since the Moon's shrinking is accompanied by seismic activity like moonquakes, scientists warn that locations near fault zones could pose dangers to future human explorers.

"The global distribution of young thrust faults, their potential to be active and the potential to form new thrust faults from ongoing global contraction should be considered when planning the location and stability of permanent outposts on the Moon," said study co-author Thomas Watters from the National Air and Space Museum.

In the new study, researchers linked faults located in the Moon's southern polar region to one of the most powerful moonquakes recorded by Apollo seismometers over 50 years ago.

They found that some areas of the Moon's south pole were particularly vulnerable to landslides from seismic shaking.

SCUFFLES IN MALDIVES PARLIAMENT Opposition moves to impeach pro-China president

AGENCIES

The main opposition party in the Maldives is set to begin impeachment proceedings against its pro-China President Mohamed Muizzu.

The opposition Maldivian Democratic Party (MDP) has started the collection of signatures to begin the impeachment filing, according to local media reports.

The opposition parties have hit out at President Muizzu for his pro-China position after a Chinese spy ship was granted permission by the government to dock in Male.

A massive scuffle took place in parliament on Sunday, after which the opposition decided to begin impeachment proceedings.

A key vote on parliamentary approval for the Muizzu government was scheduled on Sunday and the violence started as the government MPs (PPM/PNC party) disturbed the proceedings, reports NDTV online.

Over the last weeks, President Muizzu who came to power with a distinctly anti-India position, has been facing pushback, especially with the diplomatic row with



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Last-minute work on stalls is underway at the Amar Ekushey Boi Mela at the Suhrawardy Udyan yesterday. The month-long fair sets off on Bangla Academy premises and Suhrawardy Udyan on Thursday.

PHOTO: AMRAN HOSSAIN

Khulna romp to the top



STAFF CORRESPONDENT

The Sylhet Divisional Cricket Stadium continued to produce low-scoring affairs, contrary to expectation and past experience, as Khulna Tigers maintained perfect start to the Bangladesh Premier League yesterday.

Khulna comfortably chased down Durdanto Dhaka's 130 for nine in 14.4 overs with all 10 wickets in hand, with captain Anamul Haque Bijoy leading from the front with an unbeaten 58 off 48 deliveries. Afi

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