

## Rain likely in parts of country: BMD

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Light to moderate rain is expected in some areas of Dhaka, Rajshahi, Mymensingh, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet and Chattogram divisions today, according to the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD).

The BMD also forecasted that weather elsewhere in the country may remain mostly dry.

In addition, moderate to thick fog may blanket the country from midnight to morning today, persisting in some areas until noon.

Air navigation, inland river transport and road communication may face temporary disruptions due to visibility issues.

Mohammad Shahinul Islam, a meteorologist with the BMD, said, currently, there is no cold wave in the country.

"However, a temperature drop is expected on February 4 and may last till the next day. The temperature may rise again from February 6 before dropping again on February 8."

"There is also a possibility of a cold wave starting from February 9," he added.

In Dhaka, the maximum temperature recorded yesterday was 26.4°C and the minimum was 17.8°C.

On Wednesday, Tentulia in Panchagarh recorded the lowest temperature of 10.4°C, while Khepupara in Patuakhali recorded the highest temperature of 28.9°C.

## Saima Wazed takes charge as WHO regional director

UNB, Dhaka

Saima Wazed yesterday assumed the charge as regional director for World Health Organization south east Asia region.

She is the first from Bangladesh and the second woman to hold this office.

She was nominated to lead the region by member countries of WHO south-east Asia at the regional committee session on November 1, 2023 in New Delhi.

Later, she was appointed by the WHO executive board on January 23, 2024 in Geneva, Switzerland.

Saima Wazed will direct international health work in 11 countries with over two billion people, said a press release.

Outlining her vision, Saima said her goal is to strengthen members states and WHO to address health gaps in the context of current realities and challenges; enable member states to devise and implement innovative local solutions for equitable and resilient health system; and empower disadvantaged and vulnerable groups.



Relatives cry as bodies of Palestinians killed in Israeli bombings lie outside the morgue of the al-Najjar hospital in Rafah in the southern Gaza Strip yesterday.

PHOTO: AFP

# Hamas unlikely to reject Gaza ceasefire proposal

But will demand Israeli withdrawal, says official; dozens more Palestinians killed in strikes

AGENCIES

Hamas is unlikely to reject a Gaza ceasefire proposal it received from mediators this week, but will not sign it without assurances that Israel has committed to ending the offensive, a Palestinian official close to the talks said yesterday.

Qatari and Egyptian mediators presented Hamas this week with the first concrete proposal for an extended halt to fighting in Gaza, agreed with Israel and the United States at talks in Paris last week. Hamas has said it is studying the text and preparing a response.

The Palestinian official said the Paris text envisions a first phase lasting 40 days, during which fighting would cease while Hamas freed remaining civilians from among more than 100 hostages it is still holding. Further phases would see the release of Israeli soldiers and the handover of bodies of dead hostages.

"I expect that Hamas will not reject the paper, but it might not give a decisive agreement either," said the Palestinian official speaking on condition of anonymity.

"Instead, I expect them to send a positive response, and reaffirm their demands: for

**"I expect them to send a positive response, and reaffirm their demands: for the agreement to be signed, it must ensure Israel will commit to ending the offensive in Gaza and pull out from the enclave completely."**

PALESTINIAN OFFICIAL  
REQUESTING ANONYMITY

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Such a long pause would be a first since October 7, when Israeli offensive in the Palestinian enclave began. Health officials in Gaza said yesterday the confirmed death toll had risen above 27,000, with thousands more dead still lying under the rubble. In the past 24 hours, 118 Palestinians were killed and 190 injured, they added.

In a sign of the seriousness of the proposal, Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh has said he will travel to Cairo to discuss it, although no firm date has been given for his trip, reports Reuters.

The diplomatic progress has been accompanied by some of the most intense fighting of the offensive. Israel launched a huge ground assault last week to capture the main southern city Khan Younis, sheltering hundreds of thousands of civilians who fled previous fighting elsewhere. Combat has also surged in the northern parts of the enclave, which Israel claimed to have subdued weeks ago.

Residents said Israeli forces pounded areas around hospitals in Khan Younis overnight, and stepped up attacks close to Rafah.

More than 30,000 people huddled in schools near Khan Younis's main Nasser hospital lack water, food, baby formula and medicines chronic conditions, said Ashraf Al-Qidra, spokesman for Gaza's Ministry of Health.

The fate of aid operations has been complicated by Israel's accusation that some employees of UNRWA, the main UN agency for Palestinian refugees, were involved in the October 7 attacks.

## Recruit more Bangladeshi workers

President urges KSA

UNB, Dhaka

President Mohammed Shahabuddin yesterday urged Saudi Arabia to recruit more Bangladeshis in different sectors.

The president made the call when a Saudi delegation headed by Dr Abdullah Mohammed Ibrahim Al-Sheikh, speaker of the Sura Council of Saudi Arabia, paid a courtesy call on him at his office at Bangabhaban in Dhaka.

According to president's Press Secretary Joynal Abedin, Shahabuddin hailed the strong bilateral relations between Bangladesh and Saudi Arabia.

Mentioning Saudi Arabia as the biggest labour market of Bangladesh, he said Bangladeshi expatriates living in Saudi Arabia are making important contributions to the socio-economic development of both countries.

The president hoped that Saudi investment in Bangladesh and bilateral trade would increase further in the future.

During the meeting, the speaker of the Sura Council of Saudi Arabia said the Saudi government and people attach great importance to the development of relations with Bangladesh.

## 139 more irregular migrants return home from Libya

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

A batch of 139 Bangladeshi irregular migrants yesterday returned home from Libya with the support of the Bangladesh government and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

The Bangladeshis, who were "detained" at different places in the city of Benghazi, landed at Hazrat Shahjalal International Airport in the capital in a chartered flight of Buraq Air at 4:15am, the foreign ministry said in a press release.

With them, a total of 1,245 Bangladeshi citizens have been brought back from the North African country since July last year, the release said.

Officials from the foreign ministry and IOM Bangladesh yesterday greeted the returnees at the airport.

Besides, IOM Bangladesh provided Tk 6,000 each to the migrants as "pocket money" and some food.

## Speedy Trial Act won't be used to suppress any group: home boss

UNB, Dhaka

Home Minister Asaduzzaman Khan yesterday acknowledged that the government has moved to make the Speedy Trial Act permanent, but said its aim is not to suppress any group or political party.

"The enforcement of the Speedy Trial Act to maintain law and order has yielded results. The law will not be used to suppress the opposition, but will be applied to those who will enforce blockade and destabilise law and order," he said at the conference room of the Ministry of Home Affairs at the Secretariat in the afternoon.

## If probe needs

FROM PAGE 1

on contemporary issues at his office at the Secretariat.

His comments came at a time when the investigators have already taken 107 time extensions to submit the probe report in the case that shook the nation to its core.

Sagar, who was the news editor at Maasranga Television, and his wife Runi, senior reporter at ATN Bangla, were killed in the early hours of February 11, 2012, in their rented flat in the capital's West Razabazar.

After the murder, senior government officials, including the then home minister, said the murderers would be arrested and brought to justice within 48 hours.

Nearly 12 years have passed, but no substantial progress has been made in solving the case. Yesterday, when the reporters asked Anisul whether the wait for justice will take 50 years, he said, "This is not the rule, this case is an exception."

"A trial is fast when the accused is caught promptly. But in cases where the criminals can't be caught, the investigation remains incomplete and so we have to give them time."

## Gripped by fear

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UP member Shafiqul said around 3,000 people from 400 families who live along the zero line in Paschimkul, Konapara, Bazar para, Hindupara, Utarpara, and Chakmapara are at risk. Many families sent their female members and children to their relatives' houses.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer Mohammad Zakaria of Naikhongchhari said, "Law enforcers and the administration are alert and monitoring the situation closely. Situation is not that bad. Immediate measures will be taken if the situation gets worse and it needs evacuation."

Locals claim that the Arakan Army, the rebel group, captured most of the small border outposts of Myanmar Border Police situated opposite to Naikhongchhari upazila.

The junta military and border police have amalgamated at the military camp opposite to the Tambru BGB camp in Ghumdhum.

The Arakan Army is trying to capture the military camp, which locals call Right Camp, triggering heavy gunfights.

Border sources said helicopters are supplying food and ammunition to the junta military.

## Bangladesh dumping ground for toxic ships

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Ships to be scrapped are bought by cash buyers from countries like St Kitts and Nevis, Comoros, Palau offering "last voyage" packages, said the NGO Platform, which often hides their original flags.

According to the Platform data from last year, a worker named Biddut, 43, fell from a height of 10 feet and got injured on June 15 while working on a Greek ship called Salamis, owned by the Polys Haji-Ioannou Group.

Several workers cutting South Korean ships owned by the Sinokor company sustained injuries or died last year. On September 19, a worker called Nazam Uddin, 33, died after falling from a Sinokor-owned ship called Adriatic Energy. He worked at the NB Steel shipyard.

On April 1, a worker named Babul, 45, was injured when using a cutting machine to dismantle Caribbean Energy, also of Sinokor; on November 10, Toha, 25 fell from a height and got injured while cutting the company's Grace Energy at Narmeen Ship Recycling; on February 13, Foyals, 32,

## Wedding joy gives way to funeral gloom

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Twelve hours later, two coffins lay beside the stage.

After the festivities had ended, Saiful went to receive Monirul, who was heading home from his workstations in Gazipur to attend his brothers' weddings, at the Daulatdia ferry terminal.

When the brothers reached the Nobuosimuddinpara Government Primary School area, the truck hit them.

On information, police rushed to the spot, but the truck driver and helper fled the scene.

SHIPS SCRAPPED IN 2023 CAME FROM	
China	59
Thailand	15
Hong Kong	15
Unknown	12
Japan	8
South Korea	8
UAE	6
Greece	6
Singapore	6
Russia	6
Indonesia	6
Philippines	5
Taiwan	5

159 out of 170 ships scrapped in 2023 were built before 2002, the year asbestos was banned.

fell from a height and was injured while working on the company's Atlantic Energy.

Since 2009, there have been 447 worker deaths in ship-breaking yards, and past studies have found that up to a third of workers suffer from asbestosis, a chronic lung condition.

In a press release issued yesterday, the platform said China tops the list for dumping the largest number of ships. "Despite the existence of state-of-the-art ship recycling facilities at national level, Chinese owners sold 71 vessels for scrapping in South Asia, 59 of which were beached in Bangladesh. While China has banned the import of waste as part of its efforts to clean its own environment and improve the quality of life of its citizens, the Chinese shipping industry is getting away with dumping its toxic waste on some of the most vulnerable communities and environments in the world," said the statement.

The Bangladeshi \$6.5 billion steel re-rolling industry gets only 10 percent of its steel from ship-breaking, according to industry insiders.

## Dozens targeted with Pegasus spyware in Jordan: NGO

AFP, Paris

Hackers have used the notorious Pegasus spyware to break into the phones of dozens of journalists and activists in Jordan over the past four years, according to the findings of an investigation released yesterday.

The Access Now NGO highlighted 35 cases of hacking that date back to 2019, with targets that also include lawyers and at least one politician.

## RHD reluctant to give up

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He said Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Corporation (BIWTC) should rather focus on improving services on its ferry routes.

The BIWTC currently operates ferries on seven wide rivers.

Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) maintains ferry terminals and carries out dredging to keep the river channels navigable for ferries and other vessels.

**WHAT DO SHIPPING MINISTRY, BIWTC SAY?**

According to the working paper of the February 11 meeting, the shipping ministry on November 24, 2022 held an inter-ministerial meeting on introducing the BIWTC's ferry service on different new routes.

The meeting, chaired by then shipping secretary, decided that ferry routes operated by the RHD will be handed over to the BIWTC and the BIWTA "for the sake of keeping the river routes navigable by carrying out dredging round the year and overall economic development," reads the document.

If necessary, steps will be taken to amend laws or rules, it said, adding that the Prime Minister's Office had issued a directive on taking necessary steps for keeping all river routes navigable by dredging.

It also mentioned that the BIWTC and the BIWTA have been operating ferries on major river routes "with reputation". However, opening of the Padma Bridge, which boosted road communication, reduced river traffic a little bit, the document reads.

In this given situation, if the ferries run by RHD are handed over to BIWTC and BIWTA, "people will get more benefit", it reads.

Asked whether the BIWTC is capable of operating such a large number of ferries, its Chairman AKM Motiur Rahman claimed, "We have the capacity."

He said many of their staffers were sitting idle after the closure of Shimulia-Kawrakandi ferry route, the largest one in the country, following the opening of the Padma Bridge in

June 2022.

But the BIWTC drew huge criticism due to the poor salvage operation after a ferry sunk in the Padma at Paturia of Manikganj recently. Besides, it earned bad name after its ferries hit the pillars of the under-construction Padma Bridge several times in 2021.

Motiur further claimed that the RHD does not have the necessary expertise to operate ferries and that they have to help the RHD in case of any problem.

Under this circumstances, the government decided to bring all ferries under the shipping ministry and the next meeting would discuss how the decision can be implemented, he added.

Replying to a question, the BIWTC chief said they wrote a letter to the RHD in this regard, but the RHD did not reply.

**WHAT DO RHD, ROAD MINISTRY SAY?**

Jamal Uddin, additional chief engineer (mechanical wing) of the RHD, said they have developed expertise in operating and maintaining ferries through working for decades.

The RHD now operates 126 ferries with 52 ferry terminals and 131 pontoons across the country, according to RHD's annual report for 2022-23.

The department has dedicated circles and divisions with a good number of staffers for planning, operations, and maintenance of ferry service, Jamal Uddin said. "What will they do [if the ferries were handed over to the BIWTC]?"

RHD Chief Engineer Syed Moinul Hasan said every government agency has its rules of business and ferry service is integral part of their job.

"Providing ferry services is our responsibility. There is no scope for handing it over overnight," he told The Daily Star yesterday.

BM Amin Ullah Nuri, secretary of Road Transport and Highways Division, said they did not get any formal proposal on handing over ferries to the shipping ministry.