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A palace by the river



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Sports, politics, and the ugly by-product



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A threat to democracy in Bangladesh



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700,000 kids could die in Sudan without more aid: UN



TOPSOIL TRADE DESTROYS FARMLAND

In a flagrant violation of environmental laws, topsoil is being removed by an excavator from a farmland in Morar Bazaar area of Sylhet's Balaganj upazila. Many vested groups have long been illegally removing and selling topsoil from farmlands across the district, while the authorities concerned seem to remain oblivious. Removing topsoil not only reduces the soil's fertility, but also disrupts the balance of the environment of the land. The photo was taken last week.

PHOTO: SHEIKH NASIR



Panic returns in Ghumdhum

Unexploded bombs lay scattered as firing goes on in Myanmar

MONG SING HAI MARMA, NAIMUR RAHMAN and MOKAMMEL SHUVO

Villagers of Ghumdhum area in Bandarban, who returned to their homes on Thursday after spending days at makeshift shelters, have been in constant fear as gunshots kept rocking the neighbourhoods at regular intervals yesterday.

Children playing in their neighbourhood again found an unexploded rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) yesterday, sending a wave of panic in the villages along the Myanmar-Bangladesh border in Naikkhongchhari upazila of Bandarban.

The people were forced to flee earlier last week as mortar shells and bullets frequently crossed the border amid fighting between Myanmar junta forces and an armed group called Arakan Army.

Bullets and explosives from Myanmar killed two people, injured several others, and caused damage to properties on this side of the border since February 4.

Around 11:00am yesterday, the bomb disposal personnel of Bangladesh Army detonated an RPG local children found by a road in Nayapara area the previous day.

Minutes later, 60-70 gunshots were heard from across the border over almost half an hour, said an official of Border Guard Bangladesh (BGB), wishing anonymity.

Around 2:00pm, a teenage boy named Yasin Arafat

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Pakistan heads for weak coalition government

Imran Khan's PTI-backed independents win most seats; Nawaz Sharif claims victory; delay in announcing result triggers speculations

AGENCIES

Former Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif declared victory in national elections yesterday, saying his party has emerged as the largest and would talk to other groups to form a coalition government as it had failed to win a clear majority on its own.

Sharif's announcement came after more than three-quarters of the 265 seats had declared results, more than 24 hours after polling ended on Thursday, marred by the deaths of 28 people in militant attacks.

Analysts had predicted there may be no clear winner, adding to the woes of a country struggling to recover from an economic crisis while it grapples with rising militant violence in a deeply polarised political environment.

The results showed independents, backed by jailed former prime minister Imran Khan, had won the most seats - 90 of the 235 counted by 1920 GMT.

Sharif's Pakistan Muslim

League-Nawaz (PML-N) won 69 while the Pakistan People's Party of Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, the son of assassinated premier Benazir Bhutto, got 51.

PTI-backed candidates - 90

PML-N - 69

PPP(P) - 51

Others - 25

Result of 235 seats announced out of 265

*Polling in one seat postponed

*A party needs 133 seats for majority

The rest were won by small parties and other independents.

Khan's party was barred from the election, so his supporters contested as independents.

Currently, there are a total of

342 seats in the National Assembly. Of these, 266 are filled by direct elections. In addition, the Pakistani Constitution reserves 10 seats for religious minorities and 60 seats for women.

Polling in one seat was postponed due to the death of a candidate.

"Pakistan Muslim League is the single largest party in the country today after the elections and it is our duty to bring this country out of the whirlpool," Sharif told a press conference in the eastern city of Lahore.

"Whoever has got the mandate, whether independents or parties, we respect the mandate they have got," he said. "We invite them to sit with us and help this wounded nation get back on its feet."

Sharif, 74, a three-time former premier, returned from four years of self-imposed exile in the United Kingdom late last year, apparently having buried a long-running feud with the powerful military.

Despite independents backed by PTI winning the most seats,

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Essential prices keep spiralling

Consumers in tight spot; experts blame inflation, dollar crisis, lack of market monitoring

SHAHEEN MOLLAH and MD ABBAS

Mohammad Shahid looked at the shopkeeper in Karwan Bazar in disbelief after hearing that a kg of onions was selling for Tk 120.

When he last bought it two days ago from the same market in the capital, the price was Tk 90.

Since haggling over the price of onions, considered an essential cooking ingredient in most households, would not be of much use, Shahid yesterday bought half a kg although he originally intended to buy more.

"I have been making such adjustments, buying fewer and fewer goods for the last one year. Sometimes I drop items on my shopping list," said Shahid who works at a fish market in the city.

His wife Nilufer Begum was also at the market looking for bargains.

"It is tough for people like us to put food on the table," she said.

These correspondents yesterday saw many people like Shahid and Nilufer being dismayed by the rising prices at the kitchen markets in Kachukhet, Ibrahimpur, and Shewrapara.

People had to spend Tk 140-150 for a dozen brown eggs, up from Tk 135-140 a week ago; Tk 190-200 for a kg of broiler chicken, up from 180-190; and Tk 300-330 for a kg of Sonali chicken, up from Tk 290-320.

Prices of papaya, bean, ladies' finger, pointed gourd, and bitter gourd have also increased by Tk 5-10 in a week while the prices of potatoes, green chilies, and tomatoes have fallen by Tk 5-10.

Rice, edible oil, lentils, spices, fish, beef, and mutton prices have been stable for almost a month.

Kamal Hossain, a grocery store owner in Karwan Bazar, said several big companies were stockpiling goods and creating an artificial crisis in the market.

"If the government cannot break up this syndicate, the prices of daily essentials will not come down," he said, adding, "We are selling products at high prices because we are purchasing these at high prices," he said.

Ghulam Rahman, president of the Consumers Association of Bangladesh, said devaluation of the taka against dollar, inflation, and import duties were driving up the prices.

In Bangladesh, the inflation surge was triggered by supply chain disruptions due to the Covid-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Later, in 2022, while global commodity prices started to decline, the significant deficits in Bangladesh's current account balance and overall balance of payments led to a sizeable depreciation of the taka.

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HIKES IN 1 WEEK	
	TK 30 PERKG
	TK 10 PERDOZEN
	TK 10 PERKG

Russia has no interest in expanding war
Says Putin in rare US interview

REUTERS

Russian President Vladimir Putin said in an interview that aired on Thursday that Russia will fight for its interests "to the end" but has no interest in expanding its war in Ukraine to other countries such as Poland and Latvia.



In his first interview since before Russia's invasion of Ukraine nearly two years ago, Putin said Western leaders had come to realize it was impossible to inflict a strategic defeat on Russia and were wondering what to do next.

"We are ready for this dialogue," he said. Putin also said he believed it was possible to reach an agreement to free US journalist Evan Gershkovich of the Wall Street Journal, who has been detained in Russia for nearly a year and is awaiting trial on spying charges.

Putin made the comments in a more than two-hour interview with conservative talk-show host Tucker Carlson that was conducted in Moscow on Tuesday and aired on tuckercarlson.com.

Asked if he could imagine a scenario in which he would send Russian troops to Poland, a Nato member, Putin replied: "Only in one case, if Poland attacks Russia. Why? Because we have no interest in Poland, Latvia or anywhere else. Why would we do that? We simply don't have any interest."

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Excitement fills the air as kids and parents watch the Sisimpur characters perform on a green stage at Ekushey Boi Mela. The organisers hold events to entertain children during Children's Hour on weekend mornings.

PHOTO: PALASH KHAN



Eminent historian Prof Abdul Momin dies

STAFF CORRESPONDENT

Eminent academic and one of the significant historians of ancient and medieval Bengal Prof Abdul Momin Chowdhury is no more.

He died at his Lalmatia residence at the age of 84 early yesterday, said Ashfaq Hossain, a professor of Dhaka University's history department.

Prof Momin, who taught at Dhaka University, was called the doyen of Bangladeshi epigraphists for his ability to decipher ancient copper plates and determine and interpret

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